

GOD IS WITH US



JACK W. PROVONSHA

With doctorates in both medicine and religion, and as a practicing physician and professor of the Philosophy of Religion and Christian Ethics at Loma Linda University for fifteen years, the author has earned the respect and confidence of thousands of medical and other professional students, for his bifocal insight into medicine and religion and for his positive



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About the Author

About the Book

In *God Is With Us* the author invites you to go with him on a high journey of mind and spirit, in quest of a mature faith adequate to cope with the G-strains to which this age of exploding knowledge and technology, morals and mores, often subjects it. Many who have done so, in the classroom, testify that for the first time the Christian faith has come alive for them. Some who were contemplating spiritual suicide as a route of escape from what had—for them—de-

teriorated into an intolerable state of tension between faith and reason, have found a new spiritual perspective that makes sense to them.

Those accustomed to a more traditional, pedestrian exposition of the faith once delivered to the saints

may find the pace and the route the author takes breathtaking if not at times disconcerting. It is certain to stimulate interest and discussion, perhaps even controversy. If so, be content to let the author explain things in his way, in his language and thought forms. His perspective of truth is Seventh-day Adventist to the core, but Adventism in conversation with persons who have become familiar with their various contemporary points of view. It is a reasoned affirmation of the faith.



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JACK W. PROVONSHA

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PREFACE

It is always presumptuous for a man to try to say anything significant about God. As God conforms to human language He invariably assumes human proportions, though perhaps a little taller. Even a good man is but likely to be projecting a composite of his own limited ideals and strivings. Can we expect God ever really to become the captive of human ideals and words? "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:7-9). "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

It is also presumptuous, I suppose, to imagine that anything can be added to what has already been said many times over. But how can a concerned believer escape giving it a try? Can he really help himself—if he is concerned? Every true faith must find expression. And if God comes through looking more or less like a man, perhaps that's the way He intended it. In the Bible the man Jesus is called "Emmanuel, . . . God with us." "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman." If it has all been said before, and better, thank God for that. It can never be repeated too often, and each must tell it in his own way even if he is not successful in saying anything profound or new.

Take this book for what it is—the confession of one man's faith in an age when such faith may appear to some slightly out of date, if not out of touch. But it is more than just a confession. It is also a rational investigation of that faith, at least of the rational form that it takes.

Of course when one does this he is always faced with a possible discovery that his faith's rational expression is but a rationalization of beliefs that initially had little to do with reason. It is tempting to claim that one has calmly surveyed the evidence, fitted it together piece by piece until logic prevailed, and then committed oneself to the unassailable. Of course, that isn't so. One rarely comes upon a faith in anything, in this manner.

It is impossible even to guess at the myriad sources of our convictions. If we were allotted a second lifetime, and if it were worth the doing, we might try to retrace our steps. Perhaps here and there we would stumble upon a familiar idea as upon a familiar landmark.

We've all had the experience of rereading a book and of finding passages we had read, underlined, and long ago forgotten, that contained ideas we had come to think were original with us. How many conversations, lectures, sermons, chats with friends, good books, even living examples, have passed through our minds leaving footprints that have guided our paths without our knowing? And what of the divine Spirit's role in all of this? What are the sources and the secret processes of a man's beliefs? Does he ever really know?

As humiliating to reason as this admission may be, it does not thereby diminish reason's true importance—only its inflated ego. The emperor without his clothing is still, after all, the emperor. If we are honest—and God help us if we are not—reason will serve to clarify, organize, and systematize our beliefs. It will perhaps suggest that some beliefs should be rejected or modified in the service of consistency. It may even enable us to purchase that rare pearl, the novel way of looking at things, the new idea. There would, of course, be no ideas at all if that hadn't happened at some time and it might even happen in ours! Reason may also smooth out paths for the laying of our footprints on the sand of other men's souls, as they have on ours.

But the emperor, if he is not honest—clothes or not—is a knave. Reason can also be the stubborn barrier against new ideas and the laying down of footprints. Many a rational argument is logic-tight, that is, in the "water-tight" sense of keep-

ing the water out. "Reason," the knave, can so distort the facts that logic and the emperor stand together on their heads in the corner. The question is ultimately one of honesty and of individual security. It is the confident, trusting soul saved by grace who can be a faithful subject of the emperor.

Honest reason must ever be at work in the storehouse of belief, "proving all things," testing, modifying, shaping, fitting, culling, filtering, screening, scrutinizing what is old and criticizing all new experience so that one can achieve through it all a faith to live by. It is perilous, of course, to allow reason thus to examine faith, but it may be utterly disastrous to true faith if one does not. As Huxley once said, "Irrationally held truths may be more harmful than reasoned errors." Above all, reason must serve the truth, not a false self. Reason in the service of the self in the state of sin is no emperor but a knave.

Such an admission faces the fact that this confession of faith is primarily a reasoned attempt to clarify a faith received from many sources. But it is more. It is also the confession of a faith retained because it could stand reason's searching scrutiny. It is a testimony to the fact that after agonizing, personal struggle one man still finds some of the old ways of looking at things more intellectually and emotionally satisfying than some of the new.

It is a confession first of all to a conviction that man is not alone. There is an answering down the halls of space and time that is not merely the echo of man's own lonely voice. And the voice that answers is God. Man is not alone because God and he are bound together by ties that are unique in the vastness. They are aware of each other, and they are both able to act in terms of that awareness.

Man is not alone, and he knows that he is not alone because the voice in the halls not only answers, it calls for man to answer. God's call is the revelation of Himself in and through the event-windows of creation, His acts in history, and man himself—especially *the Man* who "dwelt among us."

But it is a call and not a demand. God, in a sense, hazarded His omnipotence on the gaming tables of man's freedom that one day He might receive it back as man's gift of unremitting loyalty. Such omnipotence regained carried a price tag on its

sleeve. The choice might not always be for God, and it wasn't. Tragedy shattered the harmony of eternal creation, and that tragedy issued in the estrangement and loneliness and the compounding attempts to overcome them that have characterized the human story ever since. But God called in the halls of space and time, and man could know again that he was not alone in the dark and that the day would dawn when he would never again experience loneliness.

God still calls to men, and the call is an invitation to know the truth about Him—the truth that He calls, that His face is turned our way. He is not only *with* us, He is *for* us.

Since this is a book about God, much will be said in it regarding what can be known about Him. But this is not to imply that knowing the truth about God is all that is required. To know *about* God is important. To *know* God is crucial—and the two are not the same. Theologizing is *about* God. It is organized, systematic thinking concerning God as a cognitive object. To *know* God is a faith committal to God as a subject—a Thou.

Unfortunately, no sermon or book can communicate the latter. It can only express something *about* the author's knowledge *of*. Each man must learn to *know* God, by acquaintance, for himself. All that sermons and books—this book—even *the* Book can do is to help to provide the cognitive occasion for acquaintance with God.

But there is another kind of occasion. And this is about as good a note on which to begin the confession as any. It is found in the last paragraph of Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*:

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: "Follow thou Me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who He is.

The call in the halls of space and time is a call to follow Him. It is in the answering of that call that men may truly discover that they are not alone.

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“WHAT’S IN A NAME?”

This is not so much an age of unbelief as it is one in which a climate of change has radically refashioned the objects of belief. Men have not lost the capacity for faith. They have only come to trust in new and unfamiliar gods. Even when the old deities remain they wear other clothes and faces, and the faith-words themselves have assumed different meanings. The past and the present are consequently not truly in conflict—they are rather talking past each other—sometimes using different words but more often meaning different things by those they share. To many in our day the faith of yesterday speaks an unknown tongue.

This is true at every level of experience. In the great religions of the world the gods of the sophisticated and those of the masses have often borne faint resemblance to each other—even when worshiped under the same labels. That gulf has widened enormously with the rise of the gods of the age of scientific enlightenment, although only a relatively few have come to share in the posture that worship at the new shrine requires. For the masses this is not so much an age of scientific faith as it is one of worship of scientific techniques and results

or, more likely, of local deities like the Red Sox or the Dodgers, or the New York Stock Exchange, the current rock group, or even Chairman Mao. But in any case, it is clear that the modern information explosion has changed the name of the game, and along with the name, the rules of play.

But it is first of all the name, or names, with which we must contend in writing a book about God. We must at least try to converse about the same matters. Consider *that* name. How can it possibly mean so many different things?

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone (in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*), "it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be the master—that's all."

Man, "the master of all things," appears to have come to use the central word of theology, God, as he pleases—to suit his own, often hidden, purposes. And how frequently theological formulas have been the façade behind which other issues and motives have lurked and struggled. And, of course, we all know what happened to Humpty Dumpty.

If we dispense with the patently deceptive and empty uses of the word *God* we can divide the ways in which it seems to be currently employed mainly into three categories. They are: god (note the lower case *g*), "god" (the quotes denote special usage), and God with a capital *G* (the God of biblical faith).

By the lower-case god is indicated a somewhat naive concept of God, one that commonly pictures Him as inadequate to the demands of our S.C. (since Copernicus) view of the universe. The view ranges from Jane Russell's "livin' doll," to a benign or sometimes angry, bewhiskered, Jovian grandfather, ensconced in splendor on a distant, celestial throne, hurling thunderbolts or conjuring magic as the situation demands, a larger-than-life edition of an illusory carry-over from childhood's fantasy. He is the god of myth and magic—not the foundation of our very being, the Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos!

The second term—"god"—refers to a notion of God in-

creasingly popular in our times even if, as in most cases, the name itself does not appear. One author estimates that 70 per cent of scientists believe in God! But for the most part such belief is in a "god" who may also be called "design," "order," "purpose," "meaning," "beauty," and "law." He is Sir James Jeans's "cosmic mathematician."

In contrast with god, "god" is impersonal, at least in the usual sense of human personality. To clothe him, or better, *it*, in traditional corporeal or even temporal terms is thought (by its devotees) to minimize the grandeur and beauty of the universe concerning which such expressions as mind, intelligence, and awareness are anthropomorphic constrictions. According to "its" worshipers the universe is too vast, too orderly, too tremendous for the god of childish fantasy to be taken seriously, and this "god" is a reaction of modern enlightenment to that mostly prescientific deity.

The third term—*God*—contrasts with the terms *god* and "god" even while partaking of several features of both. God, as here used, is big enough for the universe we know and that is yet to be discovered. But He is also personal. That is, He possesses the traits we indicate by human personality: intelligence, awareness, and creative activity.

The term *God* does not, however, commit us to a particular spatial concept as the less sophisticated *god* does. It does not imply that God is a being among other beings, even perhaps the highest in a series—a god. God is more than just one among others. About such matters one must maintain a healthy agnosticism, that is, be prepared to admit that he does not know all there is to know.

This concept of God utilizes all humanoid descriptions as symbolic expressions of a reality for the most part transcending such descriptions. For after all, in an important sense, what does not wear human flesh may not be seen by human eyes or heard by human ears. To know God in *any* degree is to know what humans can in some way experience.

The term *God* is not a limiting expression. Rather, it suggests transcending the limits imposed by both of the other terms, *god* and "god," just as it is human, personal creativity that enables man to burst the bonds imprisoning mere objects

and the lesser organic world. God possesses as His main essentials awareness, intelligence, creativity, and compassion. And while these involve spatial limitations, special organs, and experiential learning in man, there is no necessity that such be the case with ultimate reality. It is only when conceived by man that they must appear in this form.

What God is, in Himself, can be known only by God. Man by himself can experience God only as "god" or as god. Any encounter with God (as He transcends god and "god") will depend upon the divine initiative. What is beyond man's existential limits can be experienced only when He breaks through those limits—call it "history" or whatever. That God can do this—and has done it—is implicit in the concept *God*.

How does God enter human history as God? It has been the vision of His worshipers from times immemorial that He does so as the Word of God—chiefly in, but not limited to, the Holy Scriptures, the Bible. This God-initiated intervention included, of course, the "Word made flesh"—Jesus. Those who recognized this intervention called it "revelation." But since the concept of revelation is itself involved in the process of change we referred to at the outset, let us consider at some length these God-initiated sources of man's knowledge about Him.

Until recent times Christian theologians and school children alike saw a clear distinction between natural knowledge—a function of unaided human reason—and revelation of supernatural communication directly received from God Himself. Some of the theologians in the Middle Ages encouraged the searcher for truth to approach God from either direction. Usually, however, the two were kept separate and distinct.

The Protestant Reformers often held to a notion of human depravity that rendered human reason so damaged by sin that it could not be depended upon for reliable information regarding things divine.

On the other hand, the majority of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalists questioned whether there was such a reality as supernatural revelation at all. Even when admitting that there might be, they characterized it as but a divine concession to weak minds concerning truths that might have surrendered to unaided reason had it wrestled long enough.

From the nineteenth century onward most liberal Christian theologians have tended either to identify revelation with insight, or states of feeling, or so to redefine the term that it bears little relation to cognition. This shift in emphasis has accompanied the above changes in the definition of God.

That definition here, as in other areas, is crucial.

Take “god” as an example. God at this level is primarily available to the techniques of the various sciences, the experimental laboratory, field observations, the theorems of logic and mathematics, exploration, instrumentation, and the like. While at no time could any single investigator or group of investigators necessarily claim to have exhausted the subject, yet at no time could it be said to have completely eluded them, either. There is no essential reason why it should.

Such a “god” could also be an affective or an aesthetic experience, or supposedly even a psychochemical one if the claims of psychedelic mystics are to be taken seriously. What could not apply by definition would be the earlier notion of the supernatural communication of cognitive information. Believers in “god,” in short—if they use the term at all—must apply it to the immediate data of their investigation or to some sort of private “insight” or special “grasping” of truth, but always an essentially human experience.

The older god of theology revealed himself primarily by supernatural, propositional disclosures in dreams, visions, and spoken pronouncements, which were then passed along by the recipients in oral or written form as the Holy Scriptures. Often the process was conceived of in explicitly verbal terms. The prophet, as it were, simply took divine dictation word for word. True, thoughtful souls were sometimes troubled by the divine-dictation concept. They were disturbed, for example, by the inconsistencies of four inspired Gospels, all concerned with the same events but involving considerable variation in the telling. Later biblical scholarship found all kinds of barriers to the dictation idea, for the Bible as we have it appeared to have had its own history and inner development.

It was this discovery that, unfortunately, laid much of the groundwork for modern skepticism regarding the inspired sources. However, the fault lay primarily with the earlier

claims. To demand too much of the Bible—for example, that we have in it the *ipsissima verba*, the very words of God unmodified by human transmission (and translation)—is to undercut faith at its roots unless we insist that reason and faith are inevitable antagonists. Unhappily when the weakened trunk of the verbal inspiration doctrine fell, like a decayed forest giant it took a lot of good timber with it. As a consequence the Bible was interpreted in radically different terms, again reflecting and accompanying the changes in man's concept of God.

By contrast, for the believer in God, the revelational concepts associated with the ideas of "god" and god are seen as relative and partial, just as the ideas themselves are incomplete. For the God worshiper, nature (the traditional term for design, order, and beauty), and special revelation involving prophetic dreams, visions, and the like are complementary. He knows no such gulf between supernature and nature as the worshiper of god conceives, nor so impersonal a reality as those who believe in "god." Rather, both are true—at least in part. God is involved wherever there is meaningful existence, beauty, order, and design. But that's not *all* God is. He is also personal—aware, intelligent, and active, even if such terms must be applied in unaccustomed ways to so transcendent and all-inclusive a Being.

He is the God of nature, but also the God of history and special encounters with men. He is, as well, the God of the Bible—even if the words are the words of men. As one gifted writer has put it,

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. . . . God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. . . . It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 21.

The process is, of course, not clear in all particulars. We are still far from understanding how the human mind alone

functions. But there is one source of skepticism about the Bible as the Word of God that is based on a clear misunderstanding. In this introductory chapter we would do well at least to rid ourselves of this conceptual albatross—that is, the misunderstanding regarding the nature and function of the biblical prophets.

The prophet is best described by contrasting him with what he usually is not, a systematic theologian. (And what a history of doubt and conflict can be attributed to the failure to make this distinction!) The thrusts, not to say the roles, of these two figures sometimes stand out in sharpest contrast in the literature they leave us.

A skilled systematic theologian is by training a careful, if sometimes dull, architect of ideas. He writes like a constitutional lawyer, constantly aware of the host of eagle-eyed colleagues present and yet unborn peering intently over his shoulder, ready to pounce on every show of ineptitude and careless employment of logic. He strains for factual and defensible formulations that can endure the searching scrutiny of his fellows.

By contrast, the concerns of the prophet usually carry him beyond hair-splitting details. His is a message to proclaim and a cause to defend. His tools are poetry, invective, exhortation, and diatribe—shock weapons, not the instruments of scholarly dissection. His is usually the heat of anguished concern rather than the calculating logic of analysis and synthesis. For this reason his illustrations may at times seem overdrawn and his utterances distorted by overemphasis. The prophet often shouts where the theologian speaks in more measured tones. Prophets usually proclaim and exhort rather than write books on Bible doctrines.

And of course each has his proper time and place. Some things need to be shouted about. Nothing may happen when there is no one with the courage to speak up as vigorously as may be necessary. But because of this the prophetic figure has to be listened to in the immediate and larger context out of which he speaks—certainly if one is attempting to transmute his exhortations into theology. Statements made in one setting must be compensated for by statements made in another if sys-

tematic truth is to be realized.

The Bible expresses mainly the work of prophets and not theologians—and it is necessary to recall this again and again while reading it. They were the shock troops who stormed the beaches later to be occupied and organized by the theologians, whose task must always be carried out in a less vigorous and impulsive manner.

It is for this reason that an accurate appraisal of the Bible's message can rarely be based on only one selected portion of the material. The Bible must be studied as a whole. One prophet may obscure the theological waters somewhat by his exuberance in a specific situation of need, but given many prophets, time, and a multiplicity of situations and a systematic theology can be developed.

Both the prophet and theologian are necessary. Without the one, nothing might happen. Without the other, what happened might not be easy to understand or defend. It is only that we must not confuse their roles, even if at times they were played by the same individual.

One final word about the sources of our knowledge about God. The believer in god knows that the last word was written when the last prophet laid down his pen. But is this clearly so? Not if god is God.

A professor of theology once remarked that on his campus the rule "publish or perish" was an acute fact of life, and that the reason why God is dead in contemporary theology is that God has not published for nearly two thousand years!

That all depends on what one means by God's "publishing." Can the believer really rest content with the notion that a living God put away His pen somewhere around the end of the first century and that He has remained silently, if splendidly, aloof ever since? And if that isn't so, the task of theology is never done. We must ever be alert to the latest edition, the most current issue, coming off God's press.

A vital theology is never merely a restatement of old ideas, but is continually informed by new insights and discoveries even from what appear on the surface to be unrelated areas of concern. In a later chapter, for example, we shall consider the contributions the behavioral sciences have made to our pres-

ent understanding of sin and salvation. The expanded view of the universe resulting from a single-minded application of the scientific method has very much to say to man's conception of reality, and thus also to theology. In this, too, God has a hand. Revelation is progressive, in that God must measure the unfolding of truth to the capacity of man to understand. Wherever genuine progress appears God may be publishing some new aspect of the truth about Himself. Nor must we fail to be alert to the possibility of His picking up His pen again in the traditional manner.

But to read the papers is one thing. To believe what one reads is another. The question is, Even if it is published, is it true? Can we really know? Let us think about that for a moment.

THE TRUTH IS ONE THING

"Where are you going, holy man?" a peasant of India once asked an old traveler as they stood together under the shade of a tree.

The old man answered, "To a city far away."

"In India?" the peasant queried.

The answer was, "Farther."

"In Asia?"

"Farther, farther, friend, farther; for that city I seek is Truth and it is hidden in the heart of God."

This quest was already old when Pontius Pilate asked for a definition of truth nearly two thousand years ago from a young Galilean prisoner in the anteroom of his judgment hall. The Bible records the event: "Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?" (John 18:37, 38).

Pilate did not wait for an answer, and his failure to do so has tantalized men ever since. Francis Bacon suggested in his essay *On Truth* that the question was asked only in jest. Arthur

Gossip says, This was "the cynicism of a disillusioned man of the world, or the uncertainty of one who had seen life from many angles and heard many differing opinions on most subjects confidently held."

Some feel that the question was not seriously asked because the more pressing question was the practical one of what to do with this man and the predicament into which Pilate had been summarily thrust, or that he had already received more answers from the Galilean than he could cope with. Perhaps something of all of these reasons lay behind his haste. But whether seriously or not, he asked one of the pivotal questions of life which has grown no less important with the passing of time.

In Pilate's world, as in our own, truth wore many faces. In the presence of conflicting ideologies and doctrines, each of which claims to be true, is certainty possible? Or, as we search for truth, do we stalk illusive shadows that must ever flit just beyond our grasp, like Plato's shadows of images cast by a fire on the walls of an underground cave?

Those exhausted by the quest cry out that there is no answer to Pilate's question, that truth is only a label we affix to our private prejudices. But we must not allow weary cynicism to deflect us, for the stakes are high. It is infinitely important for a man to know whether what he is saying about God bears any relation to what is actually so. One might well be staking his life on it.

How can one be certain that his ideas correspond to reality? Can one ever be sure that he is not doing something like the theologian in the following story:

At a symposium on religion and science the toastmaster, a theologian, introducing the speaker, a philosopher, said, "A philosopher is like a blind man on a dark night in a deep cellar looking for a black cat that isn't there."

The speaker-philosopher conceded, "I think, perhaps, that is a fair characterization of a philosopher. I will only point out that under exactly the same circumstances the theologian would produce the cat."

Freud had some things to say about people who see cats that are not there. No one wishes to stake his life on an illu-

sion. Can we know whether the truth about God is really true?

The facts are that *in a philosophic sense* we can not know anything absolutely. All such knowing is inferential. A man can only infer that his ideas correspond with what exists "out there," with a higher or lower degree of probability. That may be frustrating and unsatisfying since we all crave certainty. But that's the way things are. Rational certainty is an impossibility. Only faith knows for sure! With reason the best one can hope for is a maximum of coherence in his ideas. This means that if the sum total of a man's experience, the evidence, and his ideas about it do not contain contradictory elements, he can infer that he can depend upon what he believes, at least until further evidence comes along. In other words, the belief or system of beliefs that makes the most sense may tentatively be accepted and acted upon as true. Such "truth" is thus likely to prove as progressive as the inflow of new data or evidence, and honest apperception of them. There is such a thing as "present truth," that is, truth in its most recent and clearest expression.

Take the idea of God's existence. Is it true? It will serve no useful purpose to repeat here the historic proofs for such a belief. They continually find restatement in new forms. A recent observation states that it is mathematically impossible for the amino acids, upon which the life-protein building blocks depend, let alone the proteins themselves, to have come into being by an unguided, random chance encounter of the basic elements. There are simply not enough chances available in the total material of the universe. Or take the argument from personality; if God is by definition greater than I, He must be at least as personal as I am. Both of these are based on the old principle of causality, which is admittedly now in question in certain particulars. The historic proofs were unfortunately most convincing to those who already believed.

As Bernadette put it in the *Song of Bernadette*, "To him who has faith no argument is necessary, to him who has no faith, no argument is sufficient." The main difficulty with the "proofs" is that they attempted to provide a certainty which they could not. To call them "proofs" is an overstatement, but to speak of them as a part of the total evidence from experience which must be coherently accounted for is quite another.

To further illustrate the point, it may be useful to revisit one of the classical “proofs” in a slightly differing form—the cosmological argument. If I admit that anything exists—myself included—I already have a partial experience of God. And if this is all the data I possess, then the statement that God exists—even if only as “god”—is true. To exist is to partake of order and design—by definition. To believe in existence is therefore to be well on the way, at least, to believing in “god.” Like Descartes’ *Cogito, ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), I exist, therefore “god” is.

But mere existence is not all I experience. The full truth must consist of a coherent statement regarding the sum total of experience. I experience you—but I experience more than your mere “being there.” The “thou” I experience, to use Martin Buber’s expression, that is, your “personality,” is more than the sum of the elements which compose the complex configuration of compounds and processes distinguishing you as an object—an “it”—and cannot be reduced to it.

To say that one has the whole truth about God in the form of “god” is therefore either to be ignorant of or simply to reject a vast range of personal and historical human experience.

Take, for instance, the impact on the world of the events in Palestine of the first century. How are they to be explained? To pick out just one item, how does one explain away the unshakable conviction of a significantly large number of people that they had met with, talked to, and later seen mysteriously taken from them (they said up into heaven) One whom they had recently witnessed being put to a cruel death?

The alternatives to belief in that story are not many. First, there is the possibility that it is simply the kind of myth or legend that commonly springs up in the soil covering the graves of charismatic personalities. And it doesn’t take long. We have seen the mythmakers at work even in our own time. Or, perhaps, the event represented His later followers’ creatively reminiscing.

Against such explanations, however, is the fact that the story was current when key witnesses were still available in large number, and thus in a position to refute false testimony. There is hardly any question these days that the New Testa-

ment material, at least the older part of it, was written in mid-first century when there were many survivors. All kinds of scholarly evidence attest to this. The earliest writer in the New Testament, the apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, uses this very argument to counter unbelief (chap. 15).

Second, there is the alternative that the whole account was simply a fraud concocted by the leaders of the new movement when threatened with sudden extinction by the assassination of its Founder. His surviving lieutenants conspired together to prevent the movement's complete dissolution by creating the impression that not only had mere humans been unable to destroy Him but they had actually elevated Him to even higher glory.

But the question remains—Were they capable of such a conspiracy, even in their desperation? Judging by what comes through in the account itself regarding the men who claimed to have witnessed the events, this all appears quite out of character. They simply do not seem up to it. And if it were truly a conspiracy, how does it come about that they were unable to agree better on the details? And how often are men willing to die for a fraudulent cause? As to the thought that some have suggested, à la *The Passover Plot*, that the central figure Himself was the source of the conspiracy, this seems even less credible. There are limits, after all, to role playing.

A third possibility is that they were in fact the honest, sincere men they seem to be—but were mistaken. Mass delusions are not unknown in human history. But is this really easy to accept in light of the large number of persons involved, on so many different occasions, and in such varying settings? Moreover, the witnessed event came as such a surprise. It was not that for which they were looking or wishing. It was the unexpected twist, not the anticipated one!

Every alternative explanation, save that they were honest men who recalled and recorded collectively and individually as best they could what they had experienced, seems strained and overclever. If the event were not so incredible we would surely have little quarrel with granting it the status of good and reliable history. Far-less-well-attested-to events in history rest secure. Even the certain existence of a person called Socrates

has less historical support. But there is a difference: Who cares very much whether Socrates existed or not? One cannot say the same about Jesus Christ.

If the New Testament account is history, it makes a great deal of difference all up and down the line. You simply cannot take or leave Jesus Christ. And it clearly makes a difference to our choice between “god” and God. If He did what was claimed of Him, surely of all men what He said about God must be taken seriously. As one skeptical philosopher friend put it, “If the great miracle happened, you may not have established your case but you certainly have made it credible.”

The point to be made is this: Human reason must take into account the totality of experience, even elements like the probability of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, or at least honest testimony regarding it, as a part of its coherent whole. What one needs to ask himself is, “What explanation is consistent with all of the evidence and thus makes the most total sense?”

Human perception of truth, as we have pointed out, will always be relative and partial, owing to the essential limitations of human experience. That human beings do not exhaust the whole of reality goes without saying. In such questions a healthy openness is the only appropriate posture. In this light the dogmatism of some of the opposing proclamations of skepticism project an almost perverse arrogance.

But try to know we must, even if that knowledge is inevitably “through a glass, darkly.” It is only that we must always underwrite our knowing with a very large measure of humility.

Unfortunately for our analogies, the truth about God involves complications not known in other areas of knowledge—for example, the physical sciences. There, one can assume an attitude of relative moral neutrality toward the observed data. Although the truth about the atom has far-reaching moral implications (as do many other aspects of modern scientific research), these do not compare with the moral demands that theological truth makes upon a man. This fact lies behind Ellen G. White’s statement:

The perception and appreciation of truth . . . depends less upon the mind than upon the heart. . . . It claims the homage of the will. . . . Its reception depends upon the renunciation of every sin that the Spirit of God reveals. Man’s advantages for obtaining a knowledge of the truth, however great these may

be, will prove of no benefit to him unless the heart is open to receive the truth, and there is a conscientious surrender of every habit and practice that is opposed to its principles. To those who thus yield themselves to God, having an honest desire to know and to do His will, the truth is revealed as the power of God for their salvation.—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 455, 456.

Said Jesus in the Temple, "If any man will do his [God's] will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17).

All knowledge to some extent reflects the knower. No new fact, no new experience, at least after early infancy, comes without passing through the screen of a man's personal experience. New ideas are never "immaculately conceived." They always have a past. The mind unconsciously hangs new experiences on old pegs so that they are always perceived in terms of what happened before. Wilder Graves Penfield, widely honored for his achievement of the reproduction of memory, conducted experiments involving the application of delicate electrodes to exposed portions of the human brain in which he discovered that when certain areas were electrically stimulated the resultant recall possessed the quality of novelty. But in other areas the memory possessed an associative, interpretive quality. This is the way memory normally operates in life. What we have been and done in the past conditions each new encounter.

We perceive things, then, not as they are, but as we are. Truth is in fact not unrelated to those private prejudices we spoke of earlier. Each grasp inevitably has something of the "grasper" in it. This is why even in the natural sciences really new concepts are so difficult to come by. Each man tends to discover that for which he is looking. Each man has his premises, his presuppositions, his private prejudices, and they inescapably influence what and how he perceives what he sees.

And so with the truth about God when sought through reason of feeling. As one has said, "In a man's vision of God he largely sees the reflection of his own face as upon the water at the bottom of a deep well." A man will see God largely in terms of the person he himself is. And since so much of this truth projects a profound moral quality, the vision is sometimes ludicrous, too often tragic.

Another fact of life intrudes itself into one's grasp of such

truth. The mind's perceptive potential has also a defensive quality. One perceives experience in a manner that disturbs the existing sense of self as little as possible. The ego-identity's resistance to rapid modification is particularly acute when the ego structure is unstable and insecure. The mind takes care of its own. Any experience that threatens the present sense of self will be warped, twisted, "gone over" so as to minimize the threat as far as possible. The new experience may even be blotted out of consciousness altogether if the threat is acute or if the interpretive remodeling is less than successful. If the demands are so great that the ego is unable to cope with the new encounter, any number of well-known protective mechanisms may come into play—denial, rejection, distortion, reformulation, repression, and the like.

There is an old tale of a Chinese farmer who went to borrow a neighbor's rope. The neighbor responded by saying, "I'm sorry, but I'm using my rope today to tie up a pile of sand."

Said the first farmer, "But that is foolish. No one can tie up a pile of sand with a rope."

"Ah, but you can do anything with a rope if you do not wish to lend it."

It may simply be that some men's rejections of the truth about God follow an unwillingness to face up to His claims upon them even though this may not necessarily be a conscious reaction.

The only proper posture before truth is with the head bowed and with one's shoes removed from his feet. We cannot even trust our own minds, for they may trick us! Use them we must. But check them we also must—again, and again, and again. A supposed truth that cannot bear scrutiny must for that very reason be investigated. To reason is necessary, but it is always well to treat human reason with a healthy skepticism born of experience.

Above all, one must be patient. Heaven is not reached with a single bound. Man climbs the ladder round by round. Understanding usually comes with a measured cadence, one step at a time. Truth will arrive in time if one is honest and if one wills to know and to live humbly in obedience to his knowledge. Honest reason does not walk alone, in view of the fact that God is also in search of man.

Finally, to know the truth about God in His larger, as well as His smaller, reality demands the posture expressed in one of the finest scientific statements of man. "God give me the courage to face a fact though it slay me" (T. H. Huxley). Could a man be more honest with himself?

WINDOWS ON REALITY

Human beings experience directly but a narrow segment of the total range of reality. Only sound waves somewhere between 30 and 20,000 cycles are audible even to the best of us. Some animals can experience much higher-pitched sounds than man. Bats, for example, use higher frequencies as a kind of in-flight sonar. The same is true with sight. Visible light constitutes a very minor portion of the entire electromagnetic spectrum. On either side of the visible light are the infrared and ultraviolet regions, and beyond them still longer and shorter radiations not directly perceptible to man. Some of these can be "translated" into visible light by means of instruments such as the sniperscope, the various techniques of photography, and television.

In the realm of ideas experience imposes similar limitations. But there too, there are instruments somewhat analogous to the instruments of physics that enable us to extend our range of perception. The instruments of ideas are symbols of various kinds. They are especially important to our consideration of God since, like His creation, He is largely unavailable to direct sensate human experience.

A symbol, by definition, is something that points beyond itself to something else. Almost anything can serve this function, particularly in relation to so all-pervading a reality as God. Symbols may consist of objects of various kinds, or of actions. Words are man's most common and useful symbols.

Symbols may be trivial or weighty. They may be arbitrary or they may bear a necessary relation to the reality to which they point. Some theologians prefer to distinguish between arbitrary symbols and those that bear this necessary relation by using different terms, "signs" and "symbols." To illustrate, the conventional x in the simple algebraic equation, $x =$ the unknown, is a sign. It, of course, doesn't really matter whether one uses the letter x or y or z . Given names in our culture are mainly convenient labels enabling the postman to deliver the mail, or whatever, and thus are also signs. In some cultures, given names bear a relation to the individual's personality or to events surrounding his birth or even to attitudes of his parents at the time he was born. Thus they more nearly resemble theological symbols.

An illustration closer to our subject is *father*. The word itself is a sign in the above sense. It can as well be spelled *père*, *patēr*, *padre*, *Vater*, *papa*, or even dad. But the father-child relation is a symbol in that there is something about this relation that shares in the God-man relation. Sigmund Freud saw this when he mistakenly branded religion an allusion—God being the adult projection of a half-forgotten childhood pattern—the father image. The point is, "Father" is not merely a fortuitous or arbitrary assignation of God.

(The above distinction between sign and symbol is a useful one. There is need for a term that refers to a function not precisely contained in the traditional words *analogy* or *type*. Because the word *symbol* as used in the theology of men such as Paul Tillich may rest on differing presuppositions than those expressed in this book—and thus carries somewhat different connotations—it may be helpful to the reader to recognize that *symbol* as here employed is interchangeable with the expression *event-window*. A symbol or "event-window" will be the designation given to an object or activity that "points" to a reality beyond itself but also shares certain qualities with that re-

ality—thus necessarily “belonging” to it. In the above example—the father and child—certain qualities in the human relation are identical with the divine-human relation. It is in terms of these qualities such as dependence and trust that one can speak of the parent as being God to the very young child. In an illustration we shall be drawing presently—the symbolic relation of time-man and God-man—both share the quality of unconditional-conditioned. God the Creator and time share one of the same qualities in relation to man. Time is thus an adequate “symbol” or “event-window” pointing to God.)

We should add at this juncture, however, that the symbolic is not a simple function. Symbols do not merely point. As they point and thus communicate meanings and values, they also perpetuate and reinforce them. Some meanings and values would have relatively little persistence or power if they were not supported by symbols. Thus to call something a symbol or an event-window, is by no means to trivialize it. Quite the contrary. What might otherwise be relatively unimportant—that is, simply on its own terms—may become enormously valuable as an instrument conveying and preserving important truths or meanings. The question What does it mean? may thus be far more important than What is it? Underscore this point for our later consideration.

Man has been defined as *Homo sapiens*, man the thinker; *Homo faber*, man the maker (of tools, that is). He might also be defined as “the symbol user” partly as a function of both his *sapiens* and *faber* qualities. No thought, certainly no abstract thought, can probably occur without the use of symbols, at least after the language structure has been established. Practically all reasoning is verbal reasoning and could not take place (at least not to speak of) without language. Nonverbal communication occurs, of course, but not nonsymbolic.

Certainly—on the above terms—all that man can say about God is *symbolic*. There is something of this notion in the idea of God’s “acts in history” (as the realm of space and time) as in John’s “the Word [the divine *logos*] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory” (John 1:14). Our incarnate Lord, the perfect Man, is the highest Christian symbol! He said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” Jesus of

Nazareth was an event-window on God. Christians believe that He pointed to God as no one else ever had or could. What gives Him His value and relevance is, above all, His "revelance." The Indian holy man was wrong. The truth is not hidden in the heart of God, but revealed in Jesus Christ!

The pointing function of Jesus is attested to by one of the most important New Testament pronouncements. Almost nothing His followers might say could have as far-reaching implications as the confession of Peter at Caesarea-Philippi (the translation is that of Phillips):

When Jesus reached the Caesarea-Philippi district he asked his disciples a question.

"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

"Well, some say John the Baptist," they told him. "Some say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he said to them. "Who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You? you are Christ, the Son of the living God!"

"Simon, son of Jonah, you are a fortunate man indeed!" said Jesus, "for it was not your own nature but my Heavenly Father who has revealed this truth to you!" Matthew 16:13-17.

It was one thing to speak of Jesus as one of the prophets—a signal honor, by the way, in the Judaism of Jesus' day. It was an even greater honor to call Him Messiah, which is what the name *Christ* means. But it was almost breathtaking to utter the next phrase, "the Son of the living God," who by the time this was written had come to be thought of in divine terms.

It was a surprising confession against the traditional background of Messianic expectation in Israel. The Messiah was to be a highly important figure, but to make *this* claim for Him was to speak unthinkable blasphemy. It seemed to call into question the most firmly grounded and revered theological premise of Judaism—the unity of God.

The confession of Peter was a claim that the term *God* is not inappropriate when applied to Jesus Christ. And this is a claim of infinite significance. It points first of all to a truth about the created universe. Those who made that claim so transformed the Messianic role by it that He was seen in the larger dimension for what He really was—the Creator of the world, "All things were made by him" (John 1:3), and "by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:2).

It was a startling discovery! This Person, so compassionate and good, so tolerant, sensitive, and understanding, yet so strong and honest, was the Creator of the world! As it came from His hands, then, all nature bore the stamp of His character. They were His hands. Which means that any conflict or disarray that appears there as we now observe the world is a part of the continuing struggle—of the forces of evil against God.

More important, however, the claim says something about God, the Creator. The claim is a clear witness to the personality of God. Seldom does that message come through louder and more clear. But it testifies not only to His personhood, it speaks of the essential goodness of His character. It says, in effect, It was God who sensed the true thirst of the woman at the well of Sychar; it was God who said of another outcast, "Neither do I condemn thee"; it was God who cast the "proper" people out of the Temple for their sanctimonious double-dealing. It was God who would not serve their selfish desires for status in the world; it was God who shattered their pious traditions; it was God who took little children to Him when the adult world was too busy for them. It was God who ate with the publicans and sinners, indeed sought them out; and it was God who, when the world turned savagely on Him, responded only with a "forgive them; for they know not what they do"—and who wept because they spurned His gift.

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus was God "in the flesh," a theological event-window of the highest magnitude.

There are many other kinds of such windows. There are, for example, nature symbols. The ancient Hebrew poet wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, . . . There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard" (Psalm 19:1-3). It was nature-symbol that lay behind the renowned Joseph C. Aub's remark in the early days of electron microscopy, "Looking into the cell with the electron microscope gives me a sense of awe, an almost religious feeling." Whenever an object or process in nature reveals a truth about the Creator it possesses such a pointing function.

Other persons besides Jesus may, by their lives and behav-

ior, also become theological windows. The text "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" referred primarily to Jesus, but it is true also of all men to the extent that their lives are transparent to the divine reality. "Ye are my witnesses," said Jesus. In the life of every good man there is something that points to God.

There are also symbols more nearly corresponding to what has traditionally been meant by the word—communication symbols, prophetic figures of speech, poetry, verbal and other artistry. The prophetic books in the Bible are filled with symbols, sometimes intricate and obscure—as every Bible student knows.

There are ritual-symbols. The Old Testament Hebrew cultus, the tabernacle, Temple, their furniture and ceremonies, were rich in "pointing" function, as the New Testament shows, even projecting cosmic realities from the earthly model. New Testament rituals, baptism, the Lord's supper or communion, are also such ritual-symbols.

One biblical symbol, lost on most of the Christian world, deserves more than passing notice. This is a unique event-window in that it involves time rather than spatial objects or ritual behavior, though objects and activities serve to set it apart.

According to the Bible, when God finished His creation in space, including man, He created a day. This day He set apart from the rest of the days as a memorial of His creative activity. It was thus a symbol of Himself since, as we shall see in a later chapter, creativity is one of the major attributes of God.

In choosing time rather than an object in space, God selected a true symbol of Himself in terms of the earlier distinction made between sign and symbol. There is something of God in the quality of time. Time is, like God, unconditional. Man cannot control or modify time. He can only be subject to it. He cannot even define time. He can only experience it. Time is the essence of life. Time, like God, takes priority over all of man's values and efforts. Time resists every objectification. Just so, the ultimate sin against God is His "thingification." What one can turn into an object one can control and use. That sublimest of ancient moral statements, the Ten Commandments, directs one of its greatest thrusts against the using of God. God

can be no man's object.

To illustrate let us suppose that the Genesis account of Creation was written as follows: "Thus the heavens and earth were finished, and all the host of them, and God set apart a great black stone. And God blessed the black stone and sanctified it to remind all men everywhere that He had created it and all the world."

Note the consequences that would likely follow the hallowing of such a symbol. One effect would certainly be that the world's paths, at least that of the believers, would converge on the place where the black stone lay enshrined. It would no doubt eventually be vested with costly silks and brocades, decked with gold, silver, and priceless gems. Perhaps, if it were small enough, it would even be carried about in solemn processions, venerated, adored, and presented with votive offerings. The philosophically enlightened might still recall its symbolic, pointing function, but the unsophisticated would shortly prostrate themselves before the black stone as before God, and *God* would very quickly be supplanted by a god, or worse.

Or imagine that the stone might be divided into small pieces to be distributed among the faithful. How much would a tiny piece be worth on the open market? And who would reap the profits (as if we didn't know)? And how many human values would be trampled in the dust in the struggle for possession?

Possessing a piece would provide special advantages, of course, including the elimination of long and expensive pilgrimages. One could wear it as a pendant suspended by beads around one's neck, attach it to the dashboard of one's car, or carry it in one's pocket—the left breast pocket over one's heart, naturally, where it might even deflect bullets in battle.

The beauty of all this would be that the object of one's veneration could be carried whenever and wherever one wished to go. But that's just the point! Whenever men take control of God He degenerates into a god, an idol, and true worship becomes little more than magic. Such is the essence of idolatry. Men control the gods. It is not the images or shrines that define idol worship. Enlightened idolators always know that the images and shrines are human artifacts, representations of

the unseen spiritual realities beyond. They are the means of manipulating those realities. What one does at the sacred shrine is intended to influence favorably the actions of the gods. Unfortunately, it is only too easy for simple folk to lose the sense of “representation.” The verb “to venerate” easily creates its own direct object.

Men will either worship God or an idol. Where God fades out of the picture He is inevitably replaced by a proliferation of lesser deities. And modern man controls all kinds of gods, most of which do not advertise themselves as such.

God chose a moment of time as His creative symbol because of its inherent prophylaxis against idolatry. Note how difficult it is to objectify time, even a day, particularly if one marks its boundaries in the biblical fashion by occurrences such as sunsets. (Recall that the Bible marks off the day from sunset to sunset, rather than the Roman midnight to midnight.) But precisely when does the sun set—when the sun itself is no longer visible or when its effects, e.g., the sunlight on the mountains, are no longer visible? Obviously terrain, natural obstacles, even elevation, are modifying factors. And does one have a 6-week day and a 6-week night in the arctic and antarctic regions?

And *which* day has been a problem since Magellan, at least. How can so important an entity as a holy day depend on a date-line convention in the late nineteenth century? The round world makes time as a day most difficult to point to and say, “There it is.” And when men perform Magellan’s feat every hour or so in earth-orbiting satellites, what happens to such conventions?

But the problem intrudes only if one tries to objectify time. But time, we said, refuses to be turned into an object. Just as we defined idolatry not by the having of images of divine reality, but in terms of the posture before that reality—that is, one of the human assumption of control, so true worship is not a matter of objects, even of temporal objects, but of a stance one assumes before God, of the creature’s proper posture before his Creator. This posture is one honoring the divine priority. Wherever God takes the lead, it is man’s role to follow. When God speaks, man must listen. When God commands, man

must obey. When and where God sends, man must go.

Obviously, a way of life is involved in such an attitude toward God, permeating and conditioning every aspect of existence. The Sabbath event-window thus functions not only as pointing to a truth but as establishing and reinforcing a quality of existence. The day sanctifies the whole week. Placing God first is not something that can be compartmentalized.

But what about the problem of finding *the* seventh day? Can one be so specific as to say *this* day rather than *that*? The fact is, one cannot sometimes be so precise, as when dealing with matters so elusive as where on a round world the day begins. Inasmuch as the symbol primarily concerns a posture rather than an object, such precision may not be required. The posture demands no more and no less than that one be as specific as he can. In other words, to obey when God commands involves full obedience—as specific as the command is specific. One is but required to do his best to follow the divine will. But, please note, *doing the best one can* is essential to the posture, by definition.

If God had not been fairly specific, at least for most of the world the issue would not be raised. The fact is, He was quite specific as He developed the consciousness of His people Israel regarding *the* seventh day of the commandment. The Bible knows no other Sabbath than that honored since the dawn of written history by the Jews; and if the Bible is to be taken seriously that is as God would have it. The question is, Shall we let God be God? Letting God be God involves, among other things, allowing Him to create what He wills—in time as well as space.

To say that since the Sabbath was given to the Jews it belongs to them alone, as some Christians do, however, is to miss the meaning of this symbol. The Sabbath commandment points to the creativity of God and shares in qualities of that Creation like a true symbol. The creativity of God is at work, not only in *the* beginning (which, by the way, was not an exclusively Jewish event) but in *every* beginning. Observe the moral overtones of this in Exodus 31:13: "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that *I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.*"

And in Ezekiel 20:12, 20: “Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.” “And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God.” Entirely in keeping with this principle is the reference in Deuteronomy 5:15 to the Sabbath as significant of Israel’s freedom from Egyptian bondage—an event, by the way, loaded with all kinds of symbolic value, even to us.

God is creatively at work in every beginning—of the world, in the transformation and sanctification of human life, in every deliverance from bondage—but also in man’s ultimate end. In Hebrews 4:4-9 the Sabbath becomes a sign of the ultimate rest in God, which is man’s eternal goal.

The Bible knows no other Sabbath. Jesus struggled against its distortion again and again but left its principle intact. The early Christian church knew no other Sabbath. The Bible reports numerous examples of their presence in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Gradually increasing significance was given in postbiblical times to the day of the Lord’s resurrection, however, and the Sabbath was ultimately lost to most of Christendom during the period of the syncretism of Jewish and Greco-Roman motifs in the early centuries of our era, a loss that was, to a great extent, an expression of a vigorous, Christian anti-Semitism. The literature of the period is replete with warnings against Judaizing, usually meaning keeping the “Jewish” sabbath.

This is neither the time nor the place to go into this fascinating bit of Western history, but the question remains, How much has the Christian church lost over its long history through having deprived itself of so important a symbol—one loaded with so great possible significance for personal and corporate behavior?

Almost all knowledge about God that He Himself has revealed is symbolic knowledge. It is the symbol’s function to point, not to itself, but beyond to verities that would otherwise remain—not only to point but also to preserve. To guard the symbols of Christian faith and practice is to safeguard the very truth about God. The degeneration of God into god or “god”

has accompanied the decline and loss of the power of symbols to portray the truth and reinforce their application to human life.

Next we shall consider another very important symbolic avenue to God—man himself.

THROUGH MAN TO GOD

There are at least three avenues one may take to knowledge about God. He may come by way of what God has created, that is, to God through nature. Whether God be God or "god," the investigation of His creation is of inestimable importance to our knowledge about Him. Its resources are virtually exhaustless, as broad as the universe itself, and as continuous as God's unending, creative activity. Unfortunately, however, while quantitatively the most fruitful source of information, nature generally falls short of telling us everything we wish to know. Its concern is for the most part with those aspects of the Creator represented by the "god" of special meaning—wisdom, design, order, power, force, existence, or whatever. By manifesting mainly the *what* of God, nature may fail to give us the *who*.

Nature generally speaks of God as "thing" and "process" rather than as subject or person. By concentrating on these it runs the risk of ignoring, or of at least underestimating, those unique, creative acts for which "thing" words are not appropriate, acts that do not repeat themselves as processes. Occurring but once, they persist only in memory—in short, God's

personal acts, acts that are novel, unique, largely unpredictable and unrepeatable.

One may also come to God "through God," that is, one may encounter God where God encounters man, in God's mighty acts in history, and especially as such acts were recorded by those who experienced them in what we now know as the Bible. Since, as we have pointed out, God can truly be known only as He discloses Himself, this avenue will finally be normative to the other two. Nature, for example, as we now find it, participates in the ambiguity that clouds man's perception of truth. Man cannot therefore walk alone through the garden that is no longer clearly Eden and be assured of finding the unmistakable footprints of God in His creation.

Unfortunately some kind of direct encounter with God has been on the mind of almost every charismatic or mystic who attempted to lose himself in the ecstasy of beatific vision. Countless desert fathers and other tortured souls have agonized in loneliness and exhausting physical privation in caves, isolated monasteries, even on top of stone pillars, attempting to experience this vision of God.

In our own time the seekers have more often been "beat" than beatific, and their efforts sometimes having included the use of sacred libations such as peyote and lysergic acid diethylamide (Arthur Kleps entitled an article appearing in *Pageant* "With LSD I Saw God"), cast doubt on the whole effort. There is more than a little suspicion that most mystical encounters with God, ancient or modern, have had more to do with disordered psychochemistry than with a real communion of the human with the divine. This is not, of course, to discredit the emotional, ecstatic aspects of religious experience or to underplay psychochemistry. But it does underscore the need for distinguishing healthy-mindedness in religious matters from "religomania." The accounts of the psychedelic-drug users leave the distinct impression that at best theirs is a lower case god or "god," and too often a slightly tipsy one at that. But to approach God "through God" must always depend on God's approaching man. It cannot be the end result of a purely human effort because of the very nature of God. God must disclose Himself if He is to be known.

The biblical declaration “for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9) points up the limitations of the direct route to God, as does the New Testament’s, “No man hath seen God at any time.” We will be saying much more about coming to God at the point where God comes to man.

The approach to knowledge about God with which we are primarily concerned in this chapter—is to God through man. When the Book of Genesis states that God made man in His own image it implies that a proper study of God should include man, man who is a unique quality of nature. “The *Logos* was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory.)”

The assertion that man’s vision of God is but a reflection of his own face at the bottom of a deep well, if taken to mean that the vision is illusory or unnecessarily obscure, is misleading. If, on the other hand, it is made to point up the obvious psychological truth that a vision of anything whatever is, if perceived by humans, likely to be perceived in human terms, this statement is valid. It is a law of the mind, as we saw earlier, that no man sees things as they are in themselves but only as perceived by the seer. Everything man perceives must occur within, and thus be colored by, the limited range of human experience. Even the divine is clothed in some kind of human flesh when beheld by man. God could not otherwise be known.

To recognize this is to understand the incomplete character of the revelation. Yet such an awareness does not necessarily reduce the human vision of God to nonsense. Man, made in the image of God, may be but a tiny window on eternity, but it is nevertheless eternity that is visible through the window—not nothing, or an illusion. Although man is a partial image of God, it is still God, to a certain extent, who is beheld, and thus the attempt to see Him through man is eminently worthwhile.

As we look at man, what do we see? First of all we are struck by his essential unity. All of our modern investigations have underscored that fact. A prescientific world view conditioned by Plato’s dualism could describe man as a double or parallel association of soul and body, a soul inhabiting a body like Des-

cartes' ghost within a machine—what John A. T. Robinson calls an "angel in the slot machine"—and could even speculate as to its precise location, the pineal gland perhaps. But now we know that man cannot be so compartmentalized. What happens to one part of him happens to the whole of him in one way or another. Body chemistry may influence reason and emotions, even religious emotions, and ideas and feelings can in turn influence body physiology. Even man's experienced environment gets into the act. Deprive him of sensory stimulus, and his mind will hallucinate its own. Deny a child an adequate diet, security, warm, accepting surroundings, and exposure to appropriate stimuli, and his personality may be permanently distorted.

The interdependence of the various qualities that make up man is illustrated by a fascinating bit of "science-fiction" research that has been carried out at various centers in America and Europe. Let us look in on one of these in Dr. Robert V. White's Brain Research Laboratory at Cleveland Metropolitan General Hospital.

The patient was a small rhesus monkey weighing six or eight pounds. It could have been a human being since the anatomy and physiology are similar. Dr. White and his crew anesthetized the "patient." Then with a precision born of long practice he sliced through the layers of the skin about the monkey's neck cutting, separating, tying, cutting ever deeper into the neck, exposing the large vessels and nerves coursing beneath their now-severed covering of ribbonlike muscles. Muscle after muscle, vessel after vessel, nerve after nerve were sacrificed and discarded like so much garbage into the bloody pads in the bucket at his feet. Patiently, carefully, Dr. White pared away at the neck of the monkey, quiet and still under the relentless eye of the operating light. Finally, all of the tissues about the neck had been excised, leaving only the major vessels on each side of the monkey's trachea and the supporting spinal column.

Then came a critical moment. Quickly, skillfully, Dr. White severed the trachea and inserted a small plastic tube that was connected to a nearby mechanical respirator. For a moment there were worried looks as the monitor recording the

heartbeat skipped irregularly and the blood pressure dropped. This lasted but for a few nervous seconds. Soon the heart returned to a rhythm as smooth and regular as the peacefully snoring respirator nearby.

The noted professor, who had performed similar surgery on some five dozen other monkeys, continued to cut away at the head. He used an electric scalpel that burned and cut at the same time, filling the air with the acrid smell of burned flesh—the jaws, mouth, nose, ears, eyes. Finally he had what he wanted. A featureless, clean skull attached to a body.

Dr. White's forehead was beaded with perspiration, and his glasses were clouded. He looked tired. Someone asked, "Would you call this animal alive?" "Why not?" he answered. The monkey's blood pressure was stable, the heart was tracing regular patterns on the monitor, and wires attached to the skull were recording perfectly normal electroencephalographic tracings.

The next part of the operation contained the crucial step. Another, larger monkey was strapped into a plywood chair and prepared with deft movements. The skilled surgeon severed the first monkey's head and attached the major arteries leading to her head to the circulatory system of the new monkey. The monitoring machine indicated that the electrical activity in the brain was even better than when her brain had been attached to her own body, which now lay lifeless and would soon be discarded. Dr. White could keep the isolated brain alive for more than twenty hours if he wished. He could encapsulate it in saran wrap, alter the blood temperature, or test the effect of various drugs.

Could the brain still think? The EEG traces showed that it could, but of course what kind of thinking could not be known. There would be no physical pain, because all the nerves had been cut off.

Was there psychological suffering? Would the monkey feel happy or unhappy or lonely? Of course such questions were useless. Only the brain, now out of its skull cage and receiving its blood supply from the larger monkey, could know, and it could no longer communicate. What goes on in a brain that exists only as a brain in dark isolation, totally cut off

from the outside world? Does it think, does it know love, rage, loneliness?

Organ transplantation has become by now fairly commonplace. Even the most spectacular of them all thus far, the transfer of a viable human heart from one body to another, fails to make its initial headlines. But think of the implications of brain transplant! What moral and philosophical questions the prospect raises! Who would the resulting person be? Would the surgeons have transplanted a body or a brain? Who would be the donor and who the recipient? And what of the synthesis—would it still qualify as a *who*? Or would it now be only an *it*?

What we know of the unity of man's total being provides some possible answers. Man, who is a multidimensional unity, cannot be compartmentalized other than conceptually and remain man. We already know that even a relative isolation of the brain from its customary inflow of sensory stimulus grossly disturbs its normal functions. Hallucinations, delusions, psychopathological symptoms, very quickly begin to occur. Separating the heart from its previous nervous connections is one thing, but the brain is quite another. Even if the spinal cord of the recipient body could be connected precisely to that of the transplanted brain—an incredibly difficult operation technically—it would fail to function normally, since there is no precise correspondence of neurons and pathways of one individual with another. The result would be absolute isolation of the transplanted brain, or a very confused one. Either would scarcely leave the psyche of such an individual intact.

Man is a unity, a marvelously interpenetrating, interacting unity of one dimension with another—mind, body, and environment all affecting one another in sometimes subtle but often in crucial ways. This is why the health of the body is also a moral issue. What happens to a man's body is important to his entire personality and character, and thus may have eternal implications.

The unity of man leads us to an understanding of that Unity in whom there are no categorical gaps between spirit and matter, supernatural and nature. God as Creator does not merely reside on the upper floor of a two-storied universe. He lives on

all floors, just as man must be viewed, not merely as a mind, but as a whole being.

As we look at man, who is a window on eternity, we also discover something else about God. Man is a unity, but one with a center—a centered, multidimensional unity. Some areas of his being are more critical than others. He is not, throughout, of equal significance. He has a center and a periphery. What occurs at the center, in this case associated with his central nervous system, has relatively greater value than what takes place at the fringes of his being.

Applied by analogy to God, this is the negation of pantheism. God dwells on all floors, nature as well as supernature, but as a centered unity. God whose power extends out to the periphery of His creation as its sustaining energy (the Bible speaks of His “upholding all things”) is also the personal Creator on the throne of heaven—one who is the central *Who* of all of the *whats* of the universe, just as man is a precious subject at the “center” of his objective bodily reality.

When we approach God through man, then, we may know of the personhood of God. By definition He cannot be less personal than man. As we observe man’s capacity for creative activity, for freedom, for novelty, even for moral responsibility—and especially as seen in *the Man Jesus*—we observe something of the personality of God—who is also creative freedom. Man is no mere object among objects. He is creative subject.

Men who design them tell us that electronic computers can be constructed capable of doing everything man’s mind can do—even create other computers—everything except one: everything except initially programming themselves. No computer can make creative, responsible decisions. Computers can only follow orders. And this is the grandeur of man—his freedom to choose, to accept responsibility for his destiny. It is this creative freedom that constitutes the image of his Creator in his soul. Man, like God, is one, and God, like man, is personal.

A third truth we may learn about God by beholding man is that God is good. Christianity has historically been so conditioned against arrogant human claims to goodness that it has sometimes missed an important truth about God. A traditional

point of view is illustrated by this bit of historic Americana. Its author probably wouldn't qualify as a theologian, but what he said epitomizes what Christianity has often proclaimed about man. That old colonial New England preacher, Cotton Mather, who dabbled a bit in medicine between his Sunday morning pulpit exhortations to the faithful, prefaced one of his prescriptions for an ailing child with this comforting eulogy:

Think of the greivous effects of sin! This wretched infant has not arrived unto years of sense enough, to sin after the similitude of the transgression of Adam. Nevertheless the Transgression of Adam . . . has involved this Infant in the guilt of it. And the poison of the old serpent, which infected Adam when he fell into Transgression by hearkening to the Temptor, has corrupted all mankind, and is a seed unto such disease as this Infant is now laboring under. Lord, what are we, and what are our children but a Generation of Vipers?

The prescription that followed wasn't, unfortunately, any more palatable than Mather's theology. It ran, "Poor sowbug. . . . Take . . . half a pound, put 'em alive into a quart or two of wine." The dose was two ounces taken twice daily.

The world-view of the authors is different, but the expression is similar in the following statement quoted from *Time* magazine (January 17, 1969, p. 42), under the heading, "That Animal That Is Man."

First and foremost, man is an animal—but he is neither the end product of evolution nor much more than a mediocre biological success. The body he inhabits is primitive, at least 50,000 years out of date. Basically, he is one of the world's most aggressive beasts, who . . . fundamentally enjoys torturing and killing other animals, including his fellow man. . . . The rage and the lust in him are perpetually rampant.

Even Jesus said, "There is none good but . . . God." Ah, but Jesus also admonished us to let men behold "your good works," that they might "glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The grandeur of man—his ability to do other than merely follow orders—contains also the possibility of obscuring the divine vision. But Mather and the quoted behavioral scientists were wrong, at least if their statements are taken absolutely. There may still remain by God's grace something of the image of God in man—insofar as he is really man. And it is this image of goodness in man, even if not clearly seen or articulated, that forms our clearest window on God's goodness. Except for goodness revealed through man (especially in the Man Jesus),

man might never really know that the Creator Himself is good. It is the human capacity for integrity, kindness, and compassion that gives man access to these qualities in what is ultimately real. Some men might never know that God and His universe wear a friendly face if they had not seen the fact written on the face of some fellow human being.

There are, then, three paths by which men may walk to God. God may be approached through nature—and there we discover unity, order, majesty, mystery, and power. God may be approached through God, where God discloses Himself to man in history and in His revealed Word. And God may be approached through man. There we find that He is personally aware, concerned, and compassionate, that He is good, *but* only if the man through whom he is approached is also concerned and compassionate—good.

Man's role in God's creation is thus one of supreme challenge—the challenge of the possibility of being for his fellow man an open window, perhaps the only open window on God's eternal goodness. As God is one, personal, and good, so was man when created, or when he is recreated, in the divine image.

The author of an editorial comment in *Look* commemorating the *Apollo 8* moonshot, wrote:

The medieval notion of the earth put man at the center of everything. The nuclear notion of the earth put him nowhere—beyond the range of reason even lost in absurdity and war. . . . To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold, brothers who know now they are truly brothers. . . . This latest notion may remake our image of mankind. No longer that preposterous figure at the center; no longer that degraded and degrading victim off at the margins of reality and blind with blood, man may at last become himself.

And, it may be added, if and insofar as he becomes the man God created him to be, he also becomes a clear vision of God.

From that "insofar" it necessarily follows that the vision may possess greater or less clarity as man more or less achieves the Creator's ideal. It is also the case that unusual times and conditions increase the demand for clarity in general or even for specific kinds of clarification. There is thus the possibility of there being men with a unique and special call. We look now at these special avenues to God.

BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN

According to some cultural anthropologists, man's religious consciousness follows a pattern of historical development paralleling his enlarging experience of the world in which he lives. His elementary religious awareness is one of confrontation with poorly conceptualized mystery, magic, and witchcraft largely conditioned by his ignorance of many of the causative relations of nature (possibly in some cases even stimulated by accidental or intentional ingestion of hallucinogenic plants and mushrooms. At least one scholar thinks that this is the original genesis of religion).

Natural catastrophes, disease, even physiologic functions such as reproduction, poorly understood, are the sources of the anxiety, surprise, and miracle upon which primitive religion feeds. The primitive often does not so much worship as he fears. The trappings of his religion, the rituals, the dances, the ceremonial performances are the means by which he manages his daily anxieties. By placing the unfamiliar and frightening in a setting of familiar ritualistic behavior he is able to minimize some of their awesomeness. Malinowski found the Trobrianders, for example, associating their deep-sea-

fishing expeditions with religion in a way they never did their fishing ventures in the lagoon. The open ocean was fraught with peril, with sharks, and sudden storms, while the lagoon was a place of comparative safety.

This religion of the mystery of the “abyss” sooner or later becomes institutionalized into one or another form of animism where the mystery is particularized into more conceptually manageable form, into the “spirits” of fearsome places and things, and of unexplained phenomena. These are in time further formalized and objectified by means of the shrines, images, and the other paraphernalia of polytheism that bring to animism that conceptual simplification and that almost physical control of the supernatural which is the hallmark of every idolatry.

It is an easy next step to the rallying of the social group, the clan or tribe, around a few—or one—of these gods. This private deity may be granted the relative superiority over the surrounding groups and their private deities that the clan or tribe needs to feel for itself. The theological term for this is *henotheism*. According to this theory, only later does the concept of one God who is the God of all men become a possibility.

Something of this last development usually takes place, also, within the life of a single religious movement, that is, in its progression from a minority sect that feels that it has an exclusive corner on the divine market, to the eventual ecumenical tolerance that argues that God is nobody’s private property. Probably this occurs for many of the same reasons that henotheistic exclusivism turns toward monotheism—expanding horizons. (The sect usually originates among the lower, socially disinherited classes, but its vitality nearly always ensures upward social mobility, including the advantages of broader education.)

In what corresponds to the henotheistic, or more accurately, immediately post-henotheistic sectarian point of view (and once monotheism has been established this may be as far back as the newly developing sect can actually begin the process) the worship of the private deity is most often accompanied by an egocentric sense of divine election.

All men, of course, in their unthinking moments tend to

picture themselves at the center of a sort of private Ptolemaic universe where everything revolves around their own heads. This is no doubt part of what it means to be a "self." But the early egocentricity of the developing religious sect is scarcely unthoughtful. Rather, that concept constitutes the very basis for its existence, its *raison d'être*, and is deeply woven into the doctrinal fabric undergirding its sense of mission. As a consequence, when expanding horizons make its earlier claims seem untenably arrogant the survival of the sect is seriously threatened, that is, unless its sense of mission finds other bases.

If one takes the Bible seriously, however, it is difficult to think of the claims of election it makes as merely the expressions of social evolution. The doctrine is both implicit and explicit. Again and again in the Bible God makes special claims on individual persons and especially on His chosen people, Israel.

What we want to know is how this idea of special election is to be reconciled with what we have said about God as over against god or "god"—the God of universal concerns?

The doctrine of divine election is well illustrated by the special call of certain of the prophets. Listen to the words of Jeremiah:

Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.

Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. Jeremiah 1:4-9.

The terms in which Jeremiah's call is expressed may sound a little strange to many modern ears. Today's world has had its prophets too, and even called them that—including prophetic minorities—but as in other traditional words we have been considering, the meaning is somewhat different. The biblical prophet, in the old-fashioned sense, is not in current favor.

In that transmutation of God into the "god" of order, design, predictability, and rationality, the futuristic implication of the old expression "to prophesy" has become an anachro-

nism. *What* cannot “know” anything in a personal sense; that is, “god” obviously cannot know the future. Such knowing, even if it were possible, could be only a seeing of the present causes that impinge on the future. And if an element of unpredictability is postulated either at the submicroscopic level of the new physics or at the level of human freedom, the problem is compounded. The future cannot logically be known in an absolute sense, the modern world view tells us, if electrons are unpredictable and men are creative and free. For something, or some act, to exist as a future certainty, and at the same time not yet be, involves an elemental contradiction. Nothing can really be before it is, even in somebody’s mind, except as an uncertain possibility.

On these terms those fascinating predictions of the prophet Daniel, announcing in advance the precise time of the coming of Messiah (see Daniel 9:24-27) and the history of a succession of world empires followed by international divisiveness persisting until the setting up of God’s eternal kingdom, have to be given post-facto or other interpretations. Daniel’s prophetic book is frequently assigned a late date and limited historical application in order to preserve such logic.

There are two fallacies in this reasoning, however, the one relates to human actions and the other to divine. The fact is, that the truly free action is a comparative rarity even at the human level. The behaviorists are correct—almost. Things are in the genetic and environmental cards as it were, for most of us most of the time—up to a point. And to anyone having a good look at the cards, the future is already in the present.

To illustrate, a few years ago a jet fighter pilot on a routine training mission went through his elaborate preflight calculations, including the weighing of the fuel to be carried. Later his jet dissolved in flames at the end of the runway. Anyone peering over his shoulder and seeing him jot down the fuel-weight figure in terms of the cooler air at the time the calculations were made could have predicted quite accurately the effects the later, hotter, and thus thinner air would have on his take-off abilities. The crash was virtually guaranteed the moment he wrote down the error in arithmetic. Most, but not all, of life is like that. Elaborate this scene with God peering over men’s

shoulders, and something of the divine predictions of a God who *knows* "the end from the beginning" (Isaiah 46:11) can be grasped.

But we must add the fact that God, who is aware, is also active to complete the picture. In the Daniel account, the God who outlined the future of nations also says, "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 4:17). The time of Messiah's coming could be foretold because "when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son" (Galatians 4:4).

Bible prediction is not a picture of an irrational universe, of nonsense, or of a totally fatalistic process. It is a picture of a God who is aware but also active, in short, of God who is *God*. God has not abdicated His throne even while allowing a measure of human freedom. (All predictions involving such freedom must, of course, contain an element of conditionality as the Bible also clearly attests. Jeremiah 18:7-10 is a good example.)

But all of this is largely beside the point we wish to make here. The prophet's main function had not so much to do with the prediction of *what will be* as it had to do with communicating *what is*. This is the central feature of the prophet's call, and it tells us something about the nature of divine "election."

If, as we have suggested, free men tend to see things in terms of what they are, their ability to communicate truth is likely to vary widely. While all men may add their own distortions to what they say, not all will do so to the same extent or in the same way. Individual men, as avenues to cognitive knowledge about God, thus have relative value. Some are better avenues than others.

In practice this means that if God is *God*, He is also wise enough to utilize the best possible means to His ends. And so He selects. It is that simple. "If there be a prophet among you," He says, "I the Lord will make myself known unto him" (Numbers 12:6). "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man" (2 Peter 1:21). The prophet is one who, by reason of the kind of person he has been and is, is the most trustworthy man around at the moment when God has something important to say. To such a person God entrusts the special communica-

tions He has for His people.

But since the prophet is human, no single prophet will generally suffice for the whole of knowledge. The prophet's relative variability as an effective communicator makes necessary the multiple channels and the prolonged time the Bible spans. And so, although written in the words of men, taken as a whole the Bible becomes the word of God—especially when read with eyes that see (and in this sense every man may be a seer).

There is no conflict between special selections by God and His universal commitments when the selections are seen, not as expressions of partiality, but of utility. The prophets were functionally selected. They are not examples of divine favoritism. They were selected not for special blessing and merit, but for particular tasks. God is a universal Father, but not all men are everywhere equally willing or able to acknowledge His Fatherhood. The selection is thus primarily an expression of human variability, not God's. God is the eternal Father of all men everywhere, and no "respector of persons."

What has been said above applies equally to the covenant relation that a people can bear to its God, that is, to the election of a chosen people. There is a sense in which a people may function as a corporate or collective prophet. Again, however, it is the relative possibility of their communicating truth that is the basis for their selection. Isaiah's parable compares Israel to a vineyard in which the owner selects "the choicest vine." The remarkable achievements of the Jews in almost every branch of learning, science, politics, letters, commerce, even military affairs, still confirms that evaluation. But, please note, it was a functional choice and not one of divine favor. They were to become "a kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6). It was only as Israel confused the sense of prophetic mission to the world with that of high national destiny that they, like Jonah, became unfaithful to the prophetic vocation.

Since God is God, not god, it is inconceivable that He would manifest exclusive concern for a numerically insignificant people in Palestine while ignoring the merry (and sometimes not so merry) ignorance of the remainder of the world. And, if this is true, we may sometimes discover God's presence in unexpected places. If Christian missionaries had been less

blinded by prejudice and better equipped to look behind surface manifestations, less convinced of their own racial and cultural superiority, and more concerned with sharing faith than civilizing the “heathen,” they might often have been pleasantly surprised to discover God’s footprints there before them. It is to the shame of Christian missions that this has not more often been the case.

It is impossible for man to delimit, in time or space, the true extent of “God’s people”; the theologians speak of the “church invisible.” Wherever men are men of integrity and compassion, they are men of God—regardless of their obvious labels. In another sense, however, it is truer to say that *all* men everywhere really belong to God as His creatures. It is only that this sometimes invisible number acknowledge and accept His ownership, and even then, perhaps, unwittingly.

The relation of the “church visible,” the “called,” the “prophetic group,” to the church invisible—or better, to God’s people everywhere—is that of the individual prophet to his people. He is one of them. He belongs to them. They are his people, even if they reject and abuse him (something of an occupational hazard for prophets, by the way). He differs from those desert fathers we shall speak of later, who fled the companionship of their fellow men to find God in the desert, at precisely this point. The prophet’s face is always turned *toward* his people, not away from them.

It is true that sometimes the prophets spent a period of time alone—like Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist—in the isolation of the desert, discovering who they were, receiving their message and sense of mission. (It is probably equally important for a prophetic movement’s sense of identity and purpose that it endure the sectarian ghetto of its childhood and adolescence.) And sometimes the prophets affected peculiar garb and manners (Elijah’s camel’s-hair coat) as symbolic support for their sense of prophetic identity and as a means of creating the charismatic impact their role demanded. But the time always came for them to rejoin their people, though now with a difference. The prophets came back with something to say—and, equally important, *knowing* that they had something to say.

Prophets and prophetic movements constitute, within the larger whole of God's people, normative centers of growth and creativity that are intended by God to permeate the whole. They are the "leaven in the lump." They are the "growing edge" of what God is trying to do in the world. But they are not necessarily all the leaven, nor the whole growing edge. There may be other centers of activity, and there may even be growth centers within growth centers—prophets within prophets—individuals within groups, or smaller groups within larger groups, that function in this way. It is simply that the progression of the revelation of the truth about God and what He is trying to do in the world is not everywhere continuous. In some places and times, under some circumstances, it proceeds faster than in others. And those who share in the growth at its farthest reaches are debtors to those who are merely coming along—or standing still (or worse).

Prophets and prophetic movements are elected, then, to a task. They are chosen, sometimes for special purposes, because they are, for the moment, the most effective means available for God's ends. They do not thereby enjoy special favor or honor, nor do they hold exclusive claim on the divine affections. They do, however, enjoy a certain high privilege, that of being where, for the moment, the action is in the divine economy—of being "where it's at." And that's a privilege worth the while.

They also enjoy the incidental rewards that come from meaningful, purposeful existence, from doing something that "counts"—and from knowing who they are.

But being what they are, the "chosen" never forget that with such high privilege goes a commensurate responsibility. They are debtors to all those who live out their lives where the action is not. The doctrine of divine election thus says not so much about God or about man as it does about a task. It speaks not of a God who plays favorites or of men who enjoy superior status, but of a work that has to be done in the world. All men are called in one way or another to share in that work. But sometimes, not often but sometimes, because of special needs and circumstances a few are specially chosen—chosen because they are, for the moment, the best available avenues to

God. But also chosen—mark well—because God loved the world and *all* the people in it, not merely the chosen few.

All men may be instruments through whom God may say something about Himself. But some men possess the gifts to reveal Him more clearly than others. These special human symbols, or event-windows, make up the elect of God.

GOD IS CREATOR

In the light of what we have said thus far, we are now prepared to make the central assertion about God. In this chapter we shall but sketch the major thrusts of that statement, further extending its implications in the sections that follow.

The evening before Christmas 1968 the world shared in one of man's greatest technical achievements. What took place that night represented the culmination of man's developing skills over the entire course of his history, and especially that of our own century. Almost every branch of science was involved at its furthestmost reaches—engineering, astronautics, electronics, cybernetics, metallurgy, medicine, and even ceramics. Groping upward, at first slowly, then with explosive rapidity, man's developing technical skills suddenly drew together to bring about this truly magnificent achievement. And the whole human family thrilled at its daring.

More than a century before, Jules Verne had dreamed of it—in some ways with striking prophetic accuracy—but no one in his day could bring it off, and so what he wrote was the wildest of fiction. A hundred years of dazzling progress in virtually every branch of learning had to take place before Verne's

fiction could become history.

Man had finally severed the gravitational umbilical cord that bound him to earth, and now, looking back at his blue planet—suspended so small and beautiful in the blackness of space—he sensed as never before the elementary mystery of existence. They were not emotional men, our astronauts Borman, Lovell, and Anders, but they were deeply moved nonetheless and they shared their feelings with us that Christmas Eve.

As the telecast neared its end, Colonel Borman said, “*Apollo 8* has a message for you.” With that, Major Anders began reading the opening verses from Genesis about the creation of the earth. “In the beginning,” he read, “God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. . . .” Captain Lovell then took up with the verse beginning, “And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.” Colonel Borman closed the reading with the verse that read: “And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: And God saw that it was good.” When he finished he said, “Good-by, good night. Merry Christmas. God bless all of you, all of you on the good earth.”

Somehow it seemed exactly right. The commentators covering the telecast agreed that it couldn’t have been said better. Man had looked squarely into the eye of the majesty and mystery of eternity, and what he saw there was the Creator.

The concept of God as Creator is one of the most basic and fundamental tenets of Christian belief, and in any statement about God we can scarcely overlook that which sums up the whole of theology—God is Creator.

Unfortunately, the doctrine that God is Creator has been so obscured by pre- and post-Darwinian conflicts over Creation as “natural history” that Creation as a statement about God has largely been ignored. This is not the place to fight over those old battles. The event was obviously far too complex to be confined in human language and experience—not even in so revered words as those of Sacred Scripture. Imagine! The account of the creation of the world in fewer words than there are on my child’s breakfast-cereal box!

We can see now that much of the earlier struggle was

mainly to preserve factors crucial to a religious man's sense of personal identity—the security of unquestioned authority and manageable time-space parameters. Time and space are both crucial to the sense of self, and the prospect of losing the neat, six-thousand-year package into what seemed to be the abyss of astronomic time proved as threatening as did the earlier spatial innovations of Copernicus and Galileo.

Many never really grasped the significance of the theological doctrine of Creation—that it is, above all, about the Creator. They failed to realize that just as the creation in time, the Sabbath, was an event-window, so is the creation in space. The Creation points beyond itself. So preoccupied were the traditionalists with a battle to preserve a partially questionable concept of biblical interpretation that the larger war swept past them. And, to shift the metaphor, those on the other side simply lost the baby while they tidied up the nursery.

It is important in this connection to recall the difference between sign, and symbol or event-window. Every true symbol, it was said earlier, is an object or action that “points” while sharing qualities with that to which it points. In the symbol-referent complex, the object or event, while of lesser importance, is nonetheless a necessary part of the symbol, if only as a protection against illusion. *This is a point of great importance.* God takes His symbol-creations seriously. They are of utmost importance to meanings and values. He did things the way He did, intentionally. It is true that it is from such meanings and values that the symbols gain their true worth. Taken by themselves, their significance is secondary and derivative. But—and note this well—eliminate the object or event that points, and what is thus meant and valued may itself be in danger of being lost to view. That to which the symbol refers may disappear along with the symbolic object. In terms of the foregoing illustrations, as go Jesus, the Creation, and the Sabbath, so eventually may go man's conceptions of God.

The symbol-object—in this case the Creation-event—is not unimportant *by itself*, it simply is not all that important, especially in its details. If God is *God* instead of “god” some of these details might well be quite novel and astonishing. But as objective natural history it can never be precisely recalled at

this distance. Every attempt to capture it is bound to reflect, and be distorted by, the presuppositions of the would-be captors. And here, in contrast with the Christ-event, we do not have witnesses to cross-examine.

All that we can insist is that the broad outlines of the natural historical process contain no inner contradictions. Some theistic evolutionary cosmogonies do contain such, forcing us, for example, to select between Christ and Nietzsche. There is a basic contradiction, after all, in the biblical “nothing shall hurt nor destroy in my holy mountain” and Nietzsche’s survival of the fittest, “might makes right.” Nietzsche protested that Christianity had turned truth on its head by transmuting human weaknesses such as compassion and kindness into virtues. But God cannot be had both ways—not if the unity the term *God* implies is accurate.

But to return to our proposition, God is Creator. There are three major elements in this biblical teaching. They are (1) that God is one, a unity; (2) that God is the source of all that is, “the heavens and the earth and all that in them is,” and (3) that God is good—Creator, and not destroyer.

Note an essential distinction here between man the symbol, the *imago dei* of our earlier chapter, and the divine reality to which he points. Man, we said, is also one—a multidimensional unity—and man can at times be good, but only the Creator can be the source of all that is. All of man’s creative activity is within limits. Even in that aspect of his nature most resembling the Creator—his ability to choose—his freedom is bounded by the conditions of his creatureliness, his destiny. Only God is unconditioned, save by Himself.

God cannot be other than God—other than good, orderly, rational, dependable. Man thus has a kind of possibility not open to God, the possibility of irrational, self-destructive behavior. Man can contradict and deny himself. He can shatter his unity by being at cross purposes with himself. He can choose not to be. Immortal God, by His very nature, cannot cease to exist. Neither can He be other than good. In short, God cannot choose to cease being God. This is part of the meaning of the scriptural declaration, “only God hath immortality.”

The ancient Hebrew formula, "Hear, O Israel, our God is one Lord," later echoed by Islam, whatever may be the trinitarian expressions of that reality, points to a unity at the heart of things. It points to the possibility of a universe rather than a multiverse, to meaning, consistency, harmony, order, coherence, in short to a cosmos rather than chaos.

In this fact lie the roots of science itself. No investigation would be worth the attempt if it could not be initiated with some expectation of success, with the anticipation of finding nature available to reason and experiment, dependable, orderly, predictable, and at least in some measure comprehensible.

God as the Creator ties everything together. Every part of the universe is in some way related to every other part through God, who is its unifying principle. There are no radical or categorical separations between independent levels of reality. The Hebraic-biblical sense of unity is thus in sharp opposition to every dualistic separation between spirit and matter, or between supernature and nature. It rejects the two- or three-storied universe of the pre-enlightenment world view. The Bible sees God as dwelling on all floors! All is His. He is the Creator and He is one, uniting everything with His own unity. Those amazing continuities, the electromagnetic spectrum and the periodic table, are visions of God!

Man may yet be in for many surprises in his exploration of the universe, but not in for discontinuities! What he finds will fit into what he has found—because God is *one*. Since God cannot, by His very nature, oppose or contradict Himself, neither can His creation—with a single exception, that part of His creation endowed with freedom of choice.

The second biblical statement about God, that He is the Creator of all that is, has two dimensions. Being Creator of all that is means that nothing exists outside of God, nothing that does not in some way depend upon His prior being for its being. The Creator is prior to every creature.

Every creature derives its existence, its very meaning, from its creaturely, dependent status. The Bible places under judgment every creaturely attempt to usurp the divine prerogative. The fountainhead of sin, as we shall see, is characterized by the

creature's attempt to deny his creatureliness, as in Lucifer's aspiring to "be like the most High" or the enticement of Eve to be "as gods." God is a God above all gods, and His creatures are admonished to "have no other gods before Him." "Who is like unto Him?"

As Creator, God sits in judgment on human self-sufficiency, even on man's conceptions of the universe as a self-sustaining process apart from God. He sits in judgment on every denial of creaturely dependence. Moreover, He sits in judgment on every idolatrous attempt to use or manipulate the Creator to creaturely ends. The Creator cannot be used as a creaturely object.

No corner of existence is outside the divine priority. He is the creative ground of every continuity of thing and action and process. It is in proper relation to this creative ground that the creature finds meaning for his existence, security, and happiness. The attempt to go it alone leads only to alienation, estrangement, and isolation—from God and from one's fellow man. Openness to, and trust in, the Creator leads, as in human relationships, to community.

As Creator of all that is, God is also Sustainer. Science speaks of inevitable entropy—of the running down of the universal clock, long hence, perhaps, but one day. But when science speaks of entropy it has not reckoned with the exhaustless supply of energy by which God who creates, always and forever, continuously sustains the eternal process.

This is an admittedly difficult notion to come by since our observations are of clocks that run down, of rivers finding their lowest level, and of energy becoming ever less available. But it is no more difficult than the notion of energy available in the first place—of wound-up clocks, of rivers on high ground! Every cosmologist who contemplates eventual entropy must at the same time contemplate origins—and if he cannot produce a coherent explanation of how the clocks were wound in the first place, neither can he refute with assurance the assertion that they do not run down at the end.

A second implication in the notion of God who is Creator of all that is, is even more germane to our discussion, that is, to the contemporary question about God. As one looks into the

eye of eternity and asks about meaning and purpose, does one ask *what* is behind it all, or *who*? Is God spelled “god” or God? The biblical teaching about God as Creator is that His name is spelled with a capital G. Behind the *what* is a *who*.

To “create” is, in a sense, to initiate, to bring into being something not there before, at least in its present form. Creativity and freedom are thus related terms. To be free in the creative sense is to act in a manner not totally dependent upon antecedents to that action. To perform a free act is not to be acted upon by antecedent causes as in the world of things but to function as an actor or agent, to initiate events possessing the character of novelty or newness. God as Creator is the God who acts. He initiates events that do not depend on what went before. He creates *ex nihilo*, out of nothing. And to say this, is to imply that God is personal, since the free act is the highest expression of personality.

The biblical message is above all else about a God who is personal. This is true from one end of Sacred Scripture to the other and especially in the greatest of God’s acts, the Incarnation. To repeat, the biblical proclamation is that God is Creator, that He is the One *who* is at the heart of reality. God as Creator in the Bible is spelled with a capital G. And God spelled with a capital G is the God who is aware and the God who acts—creates. The universe makes sense. It is orderly, dependable, shows purpose and design—but behind it all, as its ground, there is a designer who is aware and cares. Even as we say this we must be aware, of course, of losing the capital G. An essential mystery remains, but according to the Bible no mystery about whether God knows and cares. God as Creator is personal.

The third thing we say about God when we say He is Creator is that He is good.

The Genesis account depicts God as looking at His creation and pronouncing it “good.” To create is, by definition, to do something good. God is Creator and not destroyer. Thus to speak of the eternal Creator is to speak of the ultimate triumph of goodness. The Creator can be trusted. Whatever He does is for the upbuilding, the ultimate survival and well-being, of His creatures. The universe is not an alien, hostile place. It is the

handiwork of God, and what God makes is good.

Christian theology has not always been clear on this point. (We shall soon consider the problem of evil in a universe created by a good Creator.) As we shall see later, the intrusion of non-biblical ideas into Christian belief can be blamed for much of the confusion. It has apparently always been easy to read into the biblical terms *fleshly* and *this world* attitudes derived from alien sources such as Gnosticism and Manicheanism. To the Gnostic or Manichean Christian, matter, including man's body, was not a good, but an evil, and a drag on his spiritual existence. The monastic denial of the body as a way of achieving spiritual blessedness was a logical offspring of such a notion. So is the traditional sectarian otherworldly denial of society and its institutions. A doctrine that fosters isolation from what needs to be done in this world needs to be reformed by the biblical doctrine of Creation. In the Bible, terms like *fleshly* and *worldly* are primarily ethical and not material concepts. To be "in the world" has not so much to do with geography as with morality.

The doctrine of Creation becomes the possibility of affirming the body, of seeing its functions as essentially God's "good" creations, of understanding the essential goodness of the body in terms of robust health and physical vigor, and of sensing the sinfulness of whatever act or practice depletes or distorts this aspect of God's creation. Holiness is wholeness.

To take Creation seriously means to discover in every material reality, whether personal or social, an object of legitimate concern. It is to understand that the restoration of health to mind, body, and world is the creative purpose of a redeeming faith oriented to the Edenic ideal.

God is one. God is the Creator of all that is, and it is very good. This belief is one of great significance to every aspect of human life. It is first of all the possibility of living out life in trust and confidence. It speaks of a universe that is fundamentally a friendly place. Second, this belief invests the universe with supreme moral relevance. What a difference it would make in the conduct of man's affairs if God were given priority in every aspect of human life. When the astronauts looked back at the small blue planet and the men who are riders on it

together, Colonel Borman wondered why men can't "learn to live together like decent people—" riders together on the small blue planet, but with a common Father. The concept of the Creator-God contains the idea of the universal brotherhood of man.

As Creator, God is the author of all moral value. His priority over every creature relates every moral question to His prior will. And what does God, who is ultimately good, will for man? Since He is only good, He wills only the creature's eternal blessedness—only goodness. He cares, and His expressed will is evidence of His concern.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." It still holds. God is still creatively at work in the world, in men's hearts, and earthly home. Man can trust his Creator.

Now let us look at some of the implications of these three qualities of the Creator in greater detail.

CHANGE AND THE CHANGELESS

The ancient sage Heraclitus once remarked that the only thing that does not change is change itself. He said, "You step, but do not step into the same river twice." Cratylus, the philosopher who is supposed to have communicated by crooking his fifth finger, commented when he heard Heraclitus' famous aphorism, "Ha! you can't even step into the same river once." He meant, of course, that even while one is stepping into it, the river is in the process of becoming a different river.

In seeming contradiction to the picture of orderliness, dependability, predictability, and consistency of the universe about which we spoke earlier, is another observed fact of nature, that is, that everywhere there is change and impermanence. All around us, and even in ourselves, nothing ever remains the same. From the minutest atomic fragment and the cells composing body tissues, out to the vast galactic systems, there is constant motion, continuing flow, energy transformation and exchange.

Change characterizes the entire universe clear out to its most distant observed horizons. It is, in fact, impossible to discover a single object in the whole of creation that is static, if

we bother to carry our investigations beneath the surface. Even that comfortable repository of reassuring reminiscences, the past, has a frustratingly mobile quality—the creative memory with its unsettling way of adapting how things once were to the deeper needs of the present. We do not see things as they *are* or even as they *were*. We see them as *we are*.

As change affects man, ordinarily it occurs slowly enough to enable him to assimilate it, to adapt to it, and thus to maintain a fairly continuous sense of identity—that is, a sense of who he is in relation to the things, values, and other persons around him. At times—and our world has been in one of these for several decades—the pace is too rapid to permit the usual synthesis of the past with the present, and identity confusion results. At such times the quest for selfhood may assume the almost frenzied quality everywhere evident in our society but especially among the surface-rooted young.

Religion has always served man's identity needs by providing him a sense of the stable and permanent in the midst of the unstable and transitory. In philosophic Hinduism, for example, it is Brahman-Atman, the ultimate spiritual reality beyond time and space, that provides the reassurance of continuity behind the illusory stuff of sense experience—Maya.

Plato, who deeply touched Christian theology in so many ways, spoke of what he believed to be man's immortal soul in a similar vein. Listen to him in *Phaedo*:

The soul, when using the body as an instrument of perception . . . is then dragged by the body into the region of the changeable, and wanders and is confused; the world spins round her, and she is like a drunkard, when she touches change. . . . But when returning unto herself she reflects, then she passes into the other world, the region of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives . . . being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging.

The quest for what remains the same in the midst of change was almost certainly involved in other Hellenic intrusions into the theology of the early Christian church. It underlay, for instance, the transmutation of the dynamic God of the Bible into an Unmoved Mover. It is not surprising that this occurred during the disintegration of the Roman Empire, in which another civilization was caught up in the throes of an identity crisis. The theologians almost eagerly depicted the divine per-

fection in static terms. God could not move, learn, or even feel, because He was perfect. He could only “be.” “Being” became the theological and philosophical catchword. But such security was purchased at a price. Their “god” became the frozen captive of his own eternity.

The theologians had scriptural support, of course, for this. Malachi heard God say, “I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). James had written of a Father “with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). And even of the Son of God the author of Hebrews had written, “the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

What the theologians seemed to have forgotten, however, were those other passages of Scripture where God is characterized by activity. He could change His mind. He could “repent” (or preferably “relent,” as in the R.S.V.), for example, that He made man. His emotions seemed to run the human gamut, and He could alter His plans of action to meet any contingency. Recall God’s relations with Nineveh and Jonah’s uncertainty about whether God’s word was dependable. Remember also the Bible’s picture of Moses coming off the victor in a bargaining session with God over Israel’s fate. The words of Jeremiah describe a “changeable” God.

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Jeremiah 18:7-10.

Even the mysterious name announced to Moses in the Midian desert suggests, not staticity, but activity. The Hebrew *‘Eheyeh ‘asher ‘eheyeh* in Exodus 3:14 is of uncertain interpretation, but it can mean besides the “I am that I am” of the King James Version and the “I am who I am” of the Revised Standard Version, “I will be what I will be,” suggesting not merely being but becoming. To the Greek, God *is*. To the Hebrew, God *comes*—He acts! He is the God of action, the God of history, not a “god” who merely sits in splendid but static isolation beyond history.

All of which is entirely consistent with the idea of God as Creator. It would indeed be a strange inconsonance if, after having ranged across the whole of creation where everything is in motion, we were to find it totally unlike its author. If nature and the written Word say anything at all about God, it is that He is not a God at rest, but a God in motion. The quest for God as static security beyond universal motion and change is not an answer to the problem of human insecurity, but a further deepening of the question.

The real answer to change and the identity crisis it produces is suggested by the idea of the Creator God—spelled with a capital G. The Creator as He reveals Himself, not in the formulas imposed on Him by the theologians, is a God of motion. The Unmoved Mover never existed outside the minds of insecure men. Everywhere there is creativity, action, change, development, growth—nothing stands still in all of God's universe. Change is an expression of God's continuous creation and is therefore good and to be welcomed. That's the way things are and ought to be.

But the Bible says God is also the Lord who changes not. How can both of these statements be true? Both are correct. There is a sense in which God is involved in movement, change, and another in which He remains the same.

That river we spoke of earlier, the one you can't even step into once, provides a useful analogy. A river, by definition, is a flowing body of water, yet as it flows it retains its identity and remains the same river. Its form, pattern, course, destiny, remain identifiable even as it flows. One can speak of *this* river, *the* Mississippi, *the* Amazon, *this* bend in the river, *that* island, *these* rapids, *those* eddies, shallows and, narrows. Its characteristics and its character remain the same even as its water flows.

Think for a moment of the Creator and those Bible texts revealing God's changelessness in these terms. Malachi wrote, "For I am the Lord, I change not." But the remainder of the passage says, "Therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." His changelessness had primarily to do with His character. God who was once the God of love, compassion, and goodness, ever remains loving, compassionate, and good. He continues

to manifest these qualities, albeit in a manner appropriate to changing circumstances. The judgments of God were meted out, not in terms of His changing character (for this *never* changes), but in keeping with the changing requirements of the situation. Nineveh survived, nations rose and fell, not because God changed, but because He did not. The circumstances within which His character was creatively at work changed and therefore He who is always loving and compassionate, always good, acted in a manner suited to those changes.

The “Father of lights” in James, “with whom is no variable-ness, neither shadow of turning,” is the giver of “every good gift and every perfect gift”—not a distant, splendid but immobile statue. One cannot expect God to be stationary and unmoved. One *can* depend upon Him to be loving, compassionate, and good—always, without exception. And one can count on Him to express these characteristics in varying and highly creative ways as the situation demands. But, as the river in motion is still *this* river, the Creator in action remains God.

The paradox (not contradiction) of a God who acts and intervenes in the affairs of His universe and yet is changeless provides us with the means of resolving the absolutist-relativist confrontation of our present moral situation. And this constitutes the chief reason for here referring to this aspect of God. For we live in a world that, having lost its roots in eternity, is unsure of itself in many directions—including its moral behavior.

Our world is much like the man in the story who cleaned out his files of accumulated material he felt he no longer needed, only to discover that he had burned up his birth and marriage certificates, the deed to his house, his credit cards, his driver’s license, his passport, and his only road map. Now he not only did not know who he was or where he had been, but where he was going. And, we might add, if he is not careful he may burn the whole house down on his head.

There is an old Dutch legend about a respectable, well-behaved spider who lived high under the rafters of a barn. It said to itself, “I wonder what things are like down there,” and being quite adventurous, it dropped on the end of its long,

slender thread until it came to rest on a beam many feet below. It liked the look of its new surroundings, so it spread its web and set up housekeeping. There it lived as the long days went by. It caught flies and grew fat and prospered. Then, one day, it noticed that long, slender thread running up into the darkness high above. It was puzzled, and said, "I wonder what that's for. It serves no useful purpose that I can see. I can do without it." So it broke the thread, and its home and its little world collapsed.

It is not too difficult to see this collapse in the statement of a prominent West Coast philosopher: "There are no ethical truths, there are just clarifications of particular ethical problems. Take advantage of these clarifications and work out your own existence. You are mistaken to think that anyone ever had the answers. There are no answers. Be brave and face up to it."

When pressed intellectually, undoubtedly there are many in our times who would agree with this statement. And yet men keep on trying to live by what appear very much like answers—of sorts. Why? Is it that they—like the lady in Helen Haiman Joseph's poem—are living by the empty habits of a past once created by the now-rejected answers?

The Mask

Always a mask
Held in the slim hand,
whitely,
Always she had a mask
before her face—
Smiling and sprightly,
The mask.

Truly the wrist
Holding it lightly
Fitted the task:
Sometimes however
Was there a shiver,
Fingertip quiver,
Ever so slightly—
Holding the mask?

For years and years and
years I wondered
But dared not ask.

And then—
I blundered,
I looked behind,
Behind the mask,
To find
Nothing—
She had no face.
She had become
Merely a hand
Holding a mask
With grace.

But empty masks cannot ever continue to create the illusion of faces—but perhaps that too is a picture of our present world.

Or is it that men from fear hang on to the “better times” of the past when they were more sure of things and of themselves, and thus do not truly live by their wits? For if what our philosopher said were everywhere lived out . . . ! But pray God that men never do live it out—at least not many men.

One reason for the belief of many that morality is relative and that the often-competing answers to moral questions are all of similar worth (which is to say, of course, of little worth) is that this is how things seem to be anthropologically. There is scarcely anything thought to be right in one culture that has at some time not been thought to be wrong in some other. Can one really say, therefore, “I am right and you are wrong” in questions of morals?

Closer inspection reveals this observation to be false, however. There are far more continuities than discontinuities in moral practice, even in widely separated cultural settings. Even what sometimes seem on the surface to be discontinuities, on more thoughtful examination often turn out to be attempts to achieve identical goals, however differently perceived. This is true even in the same culture where generation gaps are emphasized by rapid changes across the board (when moral or immoral behavior is not merely reactionary). The “kids” often really want the same things as their parents—only they perceive things differently because of their differing backgrounds and ranges of experience—or inexperience.

But the nagging suspicion that there really is nothing behind the mask remains. And this frightens more men than will admit it. God (not god or "god") is the answer to that fear, as well as to the moral tensions change brings. The Creator as the source of all that is, is also the source of all value. Let us explore for a moment what this means to morality.

What God wills is good, and God wills man's blessedness. Moreover, since God is *one*, blessedness is *one* thing. Thus what God wills is not capricious or arbitrary. An old philosophic chestnut runs, "Is it right because God wills it or does God will it because it is right?" This is a nonsensical question if God is *God*. For as the source of everything that is—noncapricious, orderly, one, noncontradictory, and good—how could what God wills be other than what is right? What *is*, is right because He wills what is. And to say what *is*, is simply another way of saying what is self-consistent—one. What is, is and cannot be otherwise. And what is reflects the self-existent One who cannot by nature be other than He is (for example, evil or destructive).

But God is also Creator, the God of action. God wills motion. Historically—that is, in time-space as it refers to man—this motion speaks of growth, development, freedom, even of the freedom of the creature to deny its Creator. Thus there is change. Two elements, then, are present in God, as in the river—what *is*, that is, His character, and His activity in relation to creaturely actions. The river maintains a consistent form while it flows.

In the study of morals this is sometimes spoken of in terms of principles and their application (a not entirely happy set of terms but somewhat useful here). Behind the flux, the situational changes in time and space, the differing circumstances as actually experienced by man in a universe in motion, is a constancy. Call it the law of God if you will. It is, in fact, His character. God wills what He is. Love as a principle (not mere affection or sentiment) is its name. This principle is always and ever absolutely unchanging, as God Himself is always God.

But love is also acted out in the midst of change. It cannot thus be rigid and insensitive in its application. The most loving act in one set of circumstances may not be the most loving act

in a quite different one. To be loving, an action must always be appropriate to the needs of the moment. The “laws” of the Bible are time-space expressions of the Eternal Absolute, descriptions of how love generally operates in the changing conditions of our being human. They may be stated as enduring principles because of the continuities of man’s relationships, but every expression of the Absolute necessarily possesses some measure of relativity simply because it is “an expression of.” This is why, even in so consistent a history as the Bible, the will of God in action appears often to be so novel and creative. God always wills love, but love to be appropriate must take into account all of the circumstances—even those that are hidden from man’s view.

The God who *is*, is also the Creator who *acts*. His unchanging character—always loving, always compassionate, always good—flows through changing circumstances in ways that “fit.” The changeless God is thus, as personal Creator, also the God who participates in change. And so with every moral reflection of God in human affairs. All truly Godlike acts will be consistent in their underlying character but appropriate to the demands of the situation in the real world.

Behind change is the changeless One who places the imprint of His changeless character on all of the creative activity of His creation. He is creative and the Creator—and that is a fact that looms large in the moral quality of man’s own real world. Man’s creativity too must bear similar marks of constancy and consistency. To create and to be moral are complementary expressions in God’s universe. They are two aspects of one great truth about God. And they must also refer to a truth about man, who was created in the image of God.

THE HEAVENS DECLARE

The physicist Robert Wood was once twitted by the platform chairman at one of his lectures: "Mr. Wood, please make clear in your talk the difference between a physicist and a metaphysicist."

"On this question," Wood said, "I can illustrate the difference by an experience of my own. I was bothered about the meaning of some observations. Tossing in bed one night, suddenly an idea came to me. It seemed like a good idea, but knowing one isn't too critical at such times, I just slept on it. In the morning I thought about it again, marshalled all the facts I had in mind, and they fitted. I thought it was a —— good idea, rushed to the library and read everything relevant, and all this fitted. I thought it was a —— —— good idea and tried it out in the laboratory . . . and it didn't work!"

"Gentlemen," he concluded, "the metaphysicist has no laboratory."

As interesting an expression of the attitude of some scientists toward religion as this anecdote projects (and metaphysics in such a context refers largely to the general subject matter of religion), it is even more instructive of a new definition of reli-

gion that the modern period has produced. Note that metaphysics is defined in the story as what is intrinsically untestable. (Contrast this with an older theological view that the metaphysicist has the whole universe and all of time as his laboratory, and that much of his data is simply not compressible into the laboratory gadgets and usual techniques of the physicist.)

The religionists themselves were largely to blame for this state of things by a common insistence that there is a transrationality about the supernatural—by definition; that when God is at work $2 + 2$ can easily equal 5, that God can make square circles, or triangles with four angles if He chooses. (They did have problems, to be sure, with such imponderables as whether God could make a boulder so big He could not move it.)

When the laboratory began to discover again and again the hidden (1) in the formula $(1) + 2 + 2 = 5$, God began to seem increasingly little more than the name given to the gaps in our knowledge, and He became ever smaller as the gaps were filled in with experimental results. Finally the French astronomer Laplace could say in response to a question as to how God fitted into his system, "Madam, I have no need of that hypothesis."

A crucial period in the conflict came in mid-eighteenth century. The date 1755 is as good as any. At that time an event occurred that has been compared by one historian to the impact of Hiroshima on our own century, the Lisbon earthquake.

The Lisbon earthquake was not the most destructive natural catastrophe the world has ever known by a long shot, but it took place at a pivotal moment in history. A series of developments had severely shaken the religious certainties of earlier times. Above all, the new freedom to experiment had raised serious questions, about whether $2 + 2$ could ever equal 5. The past screamed defensively even as it lost foothold. When Sir Isaac Newton was quoted in the newspapers of the period as having explained earthquakes in terms of gravitational forces, the divines cried, "Foul." (The great Newton was something of a hero to many religious folk. It is not commonly known, or it is considered an aberration, that Newton himself believed one of his greatest contributions to knowledge to be his commen-

tary on the biblical books Daniel and the Revelation.) But alas, Newton had said it, and other things that seriously undermined inquisitive folks' faith in miracles.

By mid-eighteenth century the forces of nature-enlightenment and those of supernaturalist reaction were poised in conflict.

The Lisbon earthquake was the intellectual catalyst that changed the mind of Western Europe. That anti-ecclesiastical gadfly, Voltaire, and others, had themselves a "Portuguese holiday" over the affair. "Why," they asked, "if God used earthquakes to punish men for their sins, did He pick on the many good folk who sought refuge in Lisbon's churches, while leaving a row of brothels virtually unscathed?" Protestants could reply that God was punishing the Portuguese Catholics for the excesses of the Inquisition. "But," came the response, "why these particular Catholics who were frequently women and innocent children?" Voltaire wrote a cynical poem and, of course, his *Candide*, who dying in the ruins of Lisbon, moans, "If this is the best of all possible worlds, whatever must the others be like?"

The sequel was a pendulum movement to the opposite pole. For many, God was now no longer the mysterious, and sometimes awesome magical trickster, but the absentee operator of an automated machine. He had become the "god" of deism. And deism was the precondition of Darwinian evolution, naturalism in ethics, and the father of a long roster of other progeny unknown to the earlier period.

Meanwhile the gaps grew smaller and smaller. On every major battlefield religion gave ground until, for many, God not only died, as Nietzsche said, He was also rendered "quite unnecessary."

Sporadically, the older supernaturalism reared its moribund head, chiefly among the lower echelons of intellectual sophistication, and frequently in the form of "faith-healing," a phenomenon with a long history in Christendom. In the Middle Ages the gift was called the "king's touch." Edward the Confessor in England and Louis IX of France were both distinguished as healers. For two hundred and fifty years down to the time of Queen Anne, many of England's monarchs were

said to be so gifted. Even Napoleon Bonaparte is credited with laying effective hands on the sick. (The alacrity with which he laid hands on almost everything else in sight—including other men's wives—renders this at least credible.) And at the moment some on the mainland of China are saying similar things about Chairman Mao Tse Tung.

Dozens of religious movements have been established with healing as their central concern—the Brotherhood of Light, the Divine Science church, the Nazarites, the Jehovahites, the Irvingites, New Thought and Unity, the Brotherhood of Perfection, the Brethren of Solitary, the Old Order Amish, the Dunkards, the Shakers (who split off from the Quakers), and various Pentecostal sects such as the Holiness Church, Assemblies of God, and the General Council, as well as such quasi-religious organizations as the Theosophists, Rosicrucians, and the Anthroposophists of modern Germany, to name a few. Dozens of prominent names appear among the individual healers: Henry Brannan, A. R. Simpson, John Alexander Dowie, E. H. Cobb, J. C. Poteet, Aimee Semple McPherson, Agnes Sanford, A. A. Allen, and, of course, Healing Evangelist Oral Roberts.

For the most part the quest for miracle, besides the obvious immediate end, has expressed a need for reassurance and authority. A prominent Pentecostal leader speaks of the "tongues" miracle as not so much serving communication as providing assurance of the "Spirit's" presence. As long ago as 1590 Henry Barrowe wrote in this vein in his book, *A Brief Discovery of the False Church*, that there can be no true church and no authentic ministry or sacraments "until some second John the Baptist, or new apostles, be sent from heaven, except peradventure they, after their long travail, bring forth some new Evangelist; and surely if they make a new ministrie they must also make a new gospel and confirm it with miracles."

The Dutch scholar Dirck Coornhert, the father of the "Seeker" movement in Holland, saw no hope of a true visible church in his time, and he proposed an interim church while waiting for God to set up the authentic one. Coornhert's followers looked for a Heaven-sent apostolic founder who would establish his credentials with miracles. One of the leaders asserted, "Nobody nowadays can be accepted as a messenger of

God unless he confirms his doctrine by miracles." William Allen wrote in his book *A Doubt Resolved or Satisfaction for the Seekers* in 1655, "Therefore we must be content to wait until God shall raise up some such, whose authority in this behalf *He shall attest with visible signs of his presence, by Gifts of the Holy Ghost, and divers miracles as at the first erection of Gospel churches.*" A long-lost work by George Fox, founder of the Quaker movement, listed 150 miraculous cures performed by him as an authentication of his ministry.

This is all very near the surface in sectarian religious movements during their formative period—now as then. But the sophisticated tend to remain as unconvinced today as was David Hume in an earlier time. And the awareness of the superficial, suggestive nature of "faith" healings and other so-called miracles, including the auto- and hetero-hypnotic undergirdings of the "speaking in tongues" ecstasy, is not reassuring. Mostly, however, the skepticism comes out of the laboratory where four-angled triangles and square circles make nonsense and where one always obtains 5 by adding 2 and 2 and 1.

Probably nothing made traditional religion as unpalatable to the modern taste as its insistence on miracles—at whatever level. Physicians, for example, have seen too many tragic consequences resulting from failure to seek early treatment while consorting with "healers" to stand eagerly in line for instruction as suggested by one of them, Agnes Sanford. Miss Sanford pays what seems to be sincere tribute to their profession: "Nor do I see any need for refusing to co-operate with God by availing myself of any physical aids toward health that I know: rest, exercise, proper diet, and if necessary medicine Being sick . . . I gladly call for my best friend and adviser, the doctor." Unfortunately she interrupts this panegyric with the statement, "If I were sufficiently full of the life of God, I would not need this stimulation [from medicines, that is]." She also relates jubilantly her own experience of direct divine healing when she disregarded the advice of her doctor. Following an account of a Mr. Williams (whose heart was "leaking like a sieve [*sic*]"), who was healed under her ministrations, she intimates that "any doctor could learn to do this."

But what if the notion of a two- or three-storied universe

were an alien intrusion into Christian belief based on a mistake? What if man, as suggested in our earlier chapter, were a microcosm of the way things are in the larger universe—a universe that is not a multiverse but, instead, a many-dimensional unity?

There is that in man which belongs to predictable biological and psychological processes. All men have these in common, and thus there are sciences of biochemistry, psychochemistry, physiology, and behavioral psychology, even of sociology. But man is not totally reducible to any one of these systematic appraisals, or even to all of them. There is an unpredictable, creative element in man that makes him human. This is the basis of his uniqueness. There is the “crisis” possibility in him capable of cutting across the process qualities of his biological life, directing, modifying, manipulating, guiding, and controlling them within limits, even while not denying them.

This does not mean that the crisis and process qualities of man are categorically unrelated. They are interdependent realities. Both are present, but they are not identical or reducible one to the other. The one preserves man from disorder and chaos and thus guarantees his existence; the other keeps him human.

Projecting this view of man, the *imago dei*, into our conception of what is ultimately real, we discover that God may be observed at work in the natural process—but that is not all God is. God too is beyond His work as One who is aware, intelligent, and active. That is, God can initiate novelty. This is at least in part the meaning of the ancient *ex nihilo* formulation.

Deus creator, God is Creator. He is not just the author of what happens every day—although He is that. The famed surgeon Ambrose Paré was right when he wrote three hundred years ago, “I dress the wound, God heals it.” Or to dress Paré’s statement in the wit of a more nearly contemporary, G. K. Chesterton, “The only reason the sun rises in the morning is that God says, ‘All right, do it again.’” Thus there is a sense in which everything is supernatural. The cause of the most familiar fact is as supernatural as the so-called miracle. There is as much miracle in roses, breathing, and babies as there is in the biblical manna and the healing of the lame man at Bethesda.

One asked a sign from God; and day by day
The sun arose in pearl, in scarlet set,
Each night the stars appeared in bright array,
Each morn the thirsting grass with dew was wet.
The corn failed not its harvest, nor the vine.
And yet he saw no sign!
—VICTOR STARBUCK, "The Seekers"

But there is also a sense in which everything is natural—natural, that is, to God.

However, to assert that what repeats itself every day is all there is to God is to write His name "god." To *God* there is more. Not only are there things that happen every day; there is, as in man, novelty and things that happen only once. All that the name God demands is that there be no contradiction between the two. God cannot make a square circle, a four-angled triangle, $2 + 2 = 5$, or make a rock so big He cannot move it, because He is *one*, that is, not because He is impotent, but because He is moral. All these involve contradictions of one sort or another.

God is the God of process, therefore He is not capricious, irrational, and disorderly. The universe is an orderly, meaningful place, not chaos. But it is a place that is under the direction of intelligence. It is thus not only orderly, it is also worth-while. God is the Creator who may indeed decide to make $1 + 2 + 2 = 5$ rather than $2 + 2 = 4$. But novelty is not just another name for chaos or caprice.

Rather than contrasting supernatural and nature as in the classical two-story universe, God dwells on both floors. On this basis, we should perhaps dispense with such words as *supernatural* altogether. The actions of God might better be described as usual and unusual—the one the mark of His dependability, the other the sign of His personality. And "miracle" mainly serves this later function. The biblical symbol-events point to God in the fullest sense of the word. Primarily they spell "person." We would not discover a very important truth about God, that He is a "thou," by observation alone, though we might still be filled with amazement over what we saw. He is a "thou" as He creatively enters our history and confronts us with His unique acts, just as our knowledge of the "thou" qualities of another human being is not derived from his blood

pressure, pulse, temperature, blood chemistry, or vital statistics. Such knowledge is imposed upon us as we are grasped by the encounter with his uniqueness.

Most actions of even great men are indistinguishable from those of men of average gifts. Great men and peasants alike dress, shave, eat, brush their teeth, and have body temperatures of 98.6° Fahrenheit. Dr. Beeching, Dean of Norwich, used to surprise his classes by pulling a fig out of his pocket and telling them to observe carefully how the great Duke of Wellington ate figs. But it turned out to be the same old method: cut off the stalk, peel, and swallow.

One does not understand the Duke of Wellington the least bit better for knowing that he ate figs exactly as any ordinary human being does. But, another story does reveal the uniqueness of the famed military hero. On the way out to the Peninsular War, his aide-de-camp rushed with great excitement into the Duke's cabin and told him that the captain was convinced the ship would sink within fifteen minutes. The Duke then calmly surmised, without any trace of fear or alarm, that there would therefore be no point in taking off his boots!

The God of the Bible is revealed to men in His routine activities of sustaining and guiding the universe, which He has created. But as the need indicates, He is not bound to continue His usual activity, at least in the usual way. He can and does vary the routine to meet differing needs, and then His unusual actions tell us some very important things about God, including the fact that He is unique, aware, intelligent, and active—in short, personal. All that radical monotheism demands is that such actions not be essentially unnatural, that is, irrational and contradictory—even though they are unusual or out of the ordinary.

These actions may not, of course, always conform to men's expectations or previous observations. The laws of nature as defined by man are based on man's statistical observations of God's routine activities. They are not necessarily laws men or even God imposes upon nature. Natural order, as it is in itself, hopefully to be observed with accuracy by man, may not always precisely coincide with man's finite observations. But it will be orderly when truly observed and comprehended. This fol-

lows from the concept *God*.

The miracle's function is to call attention to (the word is derived from a Latin word meaning "to stare at") and to communicate. It is in the truest sense of our earlier discussion an event-window, in which case that which happens is not as important as what it means. In every miracle, biblical or otherwise, the proper posture is not that of looking *at*, but looking *through*. The miracle is a window on truth rather than the truth itself. And if the truth about God conveyed by the "divine miracle" is that He is one, that which is a symbol and thus shares qualities with that to which it points must possess something of the divine character—order, meaning, goodness, and trustworthiness. It is not out of place in the laboratory, and Professor Woods was wrong. His metaphysics is an illusion. What cannot by definition be investigated is merely a shadow of reality, or perhaps better, the shadow of a shadow; it is not reality itself.

Since the symbol-event may involve unusual, one-time happenings, unrepeated (not necessarily unrepeatable, that is, by God) novelties, the laboratory may have to deal with it indirectly at a high level of inference—even perhaps limited to the examination of the trustworthiness of subjective-experience-testimony.

But if ultimately reality is truly one, if any part of it can be examined and tested, none of it is totally beyond investigation. "Taste and see that the Lord is good" is, after all, an invitation to experiment. Each aspect or dimension of reality, however, has its own appropriate experimental method. The physicist's mistake was in attempting to apply the methods of his particular discipline to areas in which they did not apply. A similar mistake is made by behaviorist psychologists. But these errors in no way cast doubt on the investigation itself.

To recapitulate, then, the Bible reveals God to be, not outside of nature as its invader, but within it as its Creator and upholder. Nature's laws, properly understood, are divine laws. The universe is not capricious, but orderly. The appearance of the unusual signals, not the suspension of law and order, but their operation at a new dimension. The unusual is startling and mysterious, but only because it is unfamiliar or rare, not because it is unnatural. Nothing would seem miracu-

lous to God. God is at work in His creation in the usual, as well as in the unusual. The unusual appears in response to an unusual need or to reveal a special truth. Ours is not a multiverse, but a universe in which fundamental areas of reality such as nature and supernature are not in opposition or tension with each other. It is a universe in which every good action is ultimately a divine action.

That old belief in a two-story universe, with its relative devaluing of the ground floor, had far-reaching consequences, as we shall now see.

AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD

A "marvelous madness" swept out of the Middle East in the fourth century of our era that was eventually to touch the whole of Christendom in one way or another. It began in Egypt with two well-to-do Copts. The one, Anthony, is now an almost mythical figure; the other, Pachomius, more clearly belongs to history.

One day in church Anthony thought he heard the voice of Jesus say, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast, then come and follow me." Anthony (his wealthy parents had but recently died) obeyed at once. Saving enough aside for his younger sister, he distributed everything else to the poor and turned his back on the world.

Following several years of apprenticeship under an aged ascetic, where he sought to master the stern, unworldly life, he fled into the desert to escape the vivid temptations for which he became famous in medieval art. These began shortly after he began his life of self-denial, and continued through most of his adult years.

When the temptations increased in severity he fled still farther into the wilderness. At last, finding a distant graveyard, he

entered the darkness of an ancient tomb, arranged for a friend to bring him bread at long intervals, and settled down to a solitary existence. With fasts, abstinences, and sleepless nights he devoted himself to a life of strictest asceticism. His meals consisted of bread and water, and were eaten once a day or on alternate days, and then only after sunset. Whole nights he spent without once closing his eyes in sleep. When he could not resist lying down to rest he sometimes did so on a bed of plaited reeds and a hair shirt, but more often simply stretched out naked on the bare ground.

For many months he lived in the tomb while the demons threw themselves upon him with increasing vehemence. So violently did they attack him that at times he felt his body being beaten black and blue as he fell unconscious to the ground. Obtaining no relief, he fled still farther into the desert to a remote, abandoned fort where he endured the next twenty years without seeing anyone, taking nothing but bread and water (bread delivery was biennial) and sleeping but two or three hours per night.

All this time he struggled to distinguish which of his violent experiences were signs from God and which were from the devil (and which were, as he came to suspect, his own disordered imagination) until at last he felt he knew and returned to teach disciples the way to spiritual enlightenment. The year was A.D. 305 and marked the beginning of the Christian monastic movement.

Before his death at an advanced age on the top of a mountain overlooking the Red Sea, Saint Anthony had inspired literally hundreds to follow his example, and they could be found living the stern life in isolated caves and old tombs up and down the Nile Valley.

The life of his slightly later contemporary, Pachomius, followed a similar pattern except that he founded monastic societies whose rigid community rules protected the faithful from bodily hindrances to spiritual contemplation. In Pachomian monasteries sleep deprivation was the rule, as it was for Anthony's solitary followers, since sleep was thought to interfere with liberation of the spirit. In later years monks were forced, when sleep became absolutely necessary, to sleep

seated on low seats. (Pachomius is said to have spent fifteen long years without lying down once for this purpose.) Their food was simple and of the coarsest quality. The founder, himself, ate only bread, water, and cooked herbs mixed with ashes to render them unpalatable.

Anthony's solitary monks doubted that the members of Pachomius' communities could achieve ascetic perfection living together and enjoying one another's companionship. But Pachomius designed rules to assure it, such as never permitting his monks to smile or laugh lest they leave a door open to the devil.

The two kinds of monks did have slightly differing problems. The main hazard to the solitary (Anchorite) monk's success was pride from having gained more mastery over his body than was necessary. The community monk (Cenobite) faced the additional temptation to ostentation—mortification to impress the others, even a bit of rivalry. Pachomius' rules helped to check the competition somewhat. For example, meals were taken once a day in a refectory. If a monk wished to fast he could do so there, and frequently one would be seen to arise from the table without having touched his food. But the resulting situation was intolerable. All the others were made to feel guilty, and in the end none dared eat. Pachomius relieved the situation by ordering the monks to wear capacious hoods that covered their faces so that no one could tell what or how much they were eating—or whether at all. That lowered hood, the monk's cowl, eventually became literally and figuratively a sign of humility.

Several specific rules were intended to check both lust and ostentation. One such limited the number of olives to be eaten to exactly seven. Six were thought to contribute to pride, eight would demonstrate uncontrolled lust. Even their chapels were purposely built askew so as to avoid aesthetic pleasure in design.

At the height of this madness, thousands of solitary monks and numerous communities dotted the desert and cliffs bordering the Nile, whence they gradually spread elsewhere in Christendom, to Syria and beyond.

The accounts of those strenuous lives that have come down

to us cannot, of course, be thought of as history by contemporary standards, but there is enough factual material in them to make our point.

They tell us, for instance, of Saint Benofer, who lived for seven years in the desert sleeping like a wild beast, eating nothing but darnel leaves, and never seeing another human being; of Saint Sisoës, who made such a virtue of humility that his dearest wish was that he be held in contempt by everybody; and of Saint Isidora, who sopped up bread crumbs and swill from the kitchen floor with a sponge.

Some of those aspiring to sainthood even went so far in their renunciation as to renounce saintliness itself, and thus complete the cycle.

The legends tell of Saint John of Egypt, who remained in a hut for fifty years living on seeds and water like a bird; and Saint Pior, who lived for fifty years on a daily ration of a little bread and five olives, eating them as he walked about "because," he said, "eating must be a transitory occupation." One Marcarius used to crumble the bread he ate into a narrow-mouthed jar so he could draw out no more than a few crumbs at a time.

Saint Dorotheus chose the high heat of the noonday sun for gathering stones in the desert to build cells for those who lacked the strength. When asked, "What can you be thinking of, Father, in your old age, to kill your body in this way, in such intolerable heat?" he answered, and thus spoke for the lot of them, "I mean to kill it, since it is killing me."

They lived in suspended cages, hollow trees, foul-smelling caves, and tombs. They wore loads of chains, ate coarse food, isolated themselves from society, deprived their bodies of creature comforts, of sleep.

Finally, the movement reached its height in an innovation blessed with a certain logic, for after all, everybody knows heaven is up. This was introduced by the pillar-dwellers and especially by one of them, Simeon Stylites, who spent thirty years living and finally dying on an eighty-foot-high stone pillar in an ancient ruin.

Poet Phyllis McGinley has immortalized Simeon in a bit of doggerel:

On top of a pillar Simeon sat
He wore no mantle,
He had no hat.
But bare as a bird
Sat night and day
And hardly a word
Did Simeon say.

Under the sun of the desert sky
He sat on a pillar
Nine feet high.
When Fool and his brother
Came round to admire
He raised it another
Nine feet high'r.

The seasons circled about his head,
He lived on water
And crusts of bread
(Or so one hears)
From Pilgrims' store
For thirty years
And a little more.

And why did Simeon sit like that,
Without a garment,
Without a hat,
In a holy rage
For the world to see?
It puzzled the age,
It puzzles me.
It puzzled many
A desert father,
And I think it puzzled the Good
Lord, rather.

The underlying reasons for all this strange behavior are of course complex, partly due to the social conditions of the times, and partly related to the status needs of the individuals involved. It was heady business, after all, for runaway slaves and other social nobodies to be sought out by noble lords and ladies who might even be kept waiting at the pleasure of the "holy men" (as one was in fact for three days). They came in great numbers. Theodoret describes the pilgrims as a great human sea being fed by various rivers flowing from the four

corners of Europe to see ex-shepherd boy Simeon Stylites.

Of course, many of these poor souls were simply ill, whether secondary to the lives they led or as the primary cause for their behavior. Nowadays we would simply institutionalize them. But there remains the intriguing fact that they were ideal figures expressing the ethos of the period by their rejection of the "world."

The posture can be traced to that Neoplatonic, Gnostic-Manichean belief regarding the disvalue of matter about which we spoke earlier. Plotinus was the most significant representative of this view. Mentor of the greatest early Christian theologian, St. Augustine, and the spiritual father of all Christian mystics, he convincingly portrayed the decay of spirit into material substance, and the mystical ascent from matter back again to the spirit. His downgrading of matter infiltrated Christian theology setting up one of the sharpest and most persistent of the ancient religious dichotomies, that between the sacred and the secular. Those desert fathers fled the "world" to give themselves over to spiritual contemplation and exercise. But since the "world" included the body, they were also in a sense fleeing their bodies through vigorous self-denial.

The implications of that attitude were immediate and far-reaching, touching almost every aspect of human life. (Those Roman baths, for example, introduced wherever the Romans established a cultural foothold, were opposed by Christians not so much because they were centers of lewd and lascivious behavior, which they sometimes were, but because they represented an unholy pampering of the body. The baths survived in Islam long after they disappeared elsewhere, simply because Moslems, having never really been introduced to Plotinus, felt differently about the body.

Tatian's protest against the invasion of science into the arena of physical healing was another logical offspring of this point of view. He regarded it as not becoming to ascribe to matter the relief of the sick and condemned it as a detraction from "the pious acknowledgment of God." God was left out. The new methods worked whether or not the patient believed in God or prayed! Emperor Justinian's closure of the medical schools at Athens and Alexandria and his refusal to subsidize

state physicians and medical scholars was similarly motivated. Scientific medicine accompanied the Roman baths into the Arabian desert.

It would be incorrect to say that the attitude of the medieval church toward the body was entirely negative, however. Even Saint Francis of Assisi, who rigorously kept his body under subjection, eventually (when it was too late) came to speak of it as his “brother body” and to regret that he had been too hard on “brother ass” as he had formerly called his body. European monasteries, often little nests of originality and ferment in what was often otherwise a fixed, monolithic structure, preserved a fair amount of the medical knowledge of earlier times—a surprising fact in the light of that earlier madness of Egypt and Syria. (Which only goes to show that even a monk with dyspepsia can be practical.) But compared to their status in the primitive church, the healing arts were relegated to a distinctly inferior station. In an unpublished paper, *History of the Concept “Vocation” (Beruf)*, historian Karl Holl points out that

... late scholasticism projected an over-all plan for Christian life within which it sought to relate to one another the calling (*Beruf*) of the monk and secular work. It is found broadly developed first in Berthold of Regensburg. Taking his start from Pseudo-Dionysius and his nine angelic choirs, Berthold sees the human social order divided into nine angelic choirs. At the top stand three ruling choirs: the pope with the priests; then the spiritual people, i.e., the monks; in the third place, secular magistrates, lords, and knights. Beneath these came the six lower choirs: from the garment makers down to *those who deal with medicine*. (Italics supplied.)

A tenth choir was made up of prostitutes, usurers, junk dealers, indulgence preachers, and the like, who were considered to be engaged in occupations in which doing right was impossible.

The history of the word *vocation* is instructive here. As commonly used, at least in Protestant circles, it is a synonym with profession or trade; what one does for a living. But it was not always so. In the biblical setting it had to do with a special invitation or command from God—the “call” or “calling”—away from the mundane and everyday to a divinely appointed station. It was related to God’s, not man’s, choice. The disciples left their nets by the lake to follow Jesus’ call to become “fishers of men.”

Given the dichotomies of soul and matter, spiritual and worldly, of a slightly later period, “vocation” was logically conceived to be a call to the spiritual life. In Roman Catholicism, receiving a vocation still carries this connotation and usually refers to the separated life demanded of spiritual people such as monks and nuns.

During the Dark Ages the clergy possessed most of whatever educational advantages were available, so that it was not difficult to identify them with the professions. Lawyers were mostly canon lawyers, and so on. Thus the two terms drew together, those with the vocations were also the professionals. In the Protestant Reformation, however, Luther’s “every man a priest” served to throw that synonymity into the general market place, and now the terms vocation and profession, and even trade, mean essentially the same thing, and in the process the word *vocation* has become secularized.

There is a sense in which both points of view are correct, and the doctrine of Creation points to that truth. If God is Creator of “all that is,” the only facts of existence that do not share in the value that statement suggests are those that distort the Creation. The statement thus places in question every sharp disjunction between sacred and secular.

If what God does reflects His sacred character and purpose, all of creation is sacred—even the professions. There are no intrinsically secular or profane callings, there are only secular or profane men in them—providing, of course, the callings are related to the Creation. The laboratory is as holy as the chancel, the market place can be as sacred as the sanctuary, and there is a sanctity in housework, in being a mother, and in constructing a fine piece of furniture or a home.

The other side of that truth is that while all of life and its work can be sacred, some areas in life, some professions, symbolize that fact better than others. Just as—in one sense—the holy Sabbath was set apart to point to the sacredness of the whole week, so certain kinds of ministries have symbolic value. There is a consecration appropriate for such, which serves their symbol-function by calling attention to them. But the point is, there is no *essential* distinction that sets them apart as in the terms of the above sacred-secular antinomy.

The Creator of the world affirms the world. "Worldiness" bears, in the biblical context, ethical, rather than spatial, connotations. God is in favor of the world and its creative institutions—even if they are political.

The new secular movement in religion is correct in what it affirms, however, in the process it redefines the term *secular*. Its error lies in what it denies, omits, or disproportionately emphasizes. The "secular city" tends to project a vision of "god" not *God*. But the secular movement is correct—as Harvey Cox's other books suggest—when it insists that we ought not to leave the secular city to the snake.

Conservative Christians, particularly those deeply conditioned by the sacred-secular tension, reacted strongly against the social gospelers of the early twentieth century. They did not do so, however, because of the movement's true fault, its naivete. They reacted mainly to its this-worldly optimism. What the conservatives forgot was that the commendation at the judgment—"I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me"—has very impressive this-worldly social implications.

The social gospel's fault lay not so much in its concerns, but in its failure to appraise accurately the depth of human depravity. An affirmation of the "world" is not an invitation to Pollyanna social optimism. Sin is woven too deeply into the human fabric for that kind of euphoria. But even if the Christian despairs of making a very great impact on the total situation or even if he dents it not at all, the doctrine of Creation constrains him to give it a try. To run away from its needs he cannot. Pessimistic he *may* be, but concerned he *must* be.

Above all, he must appraise his concern as a "holy thing." Wherever the Creator is creatively and redemptively at work in the world and its institutions, something sacred is going on. "In the world but not of the world" is a statement of involvement with, and not in opposition to, the Creator.

It is the teaching that God is Creator, that He is one, that He is the source of all that is and that He is good, that girds the believer for his task—the doing of what God is doing in the

world. The Creator affirms the world. "Worldliness" in the traditional sense is rather a moral denial of God's real world. The Creator has sanctified the whole of what He has made—and is making. What God made and is making, is the world, and what God makes is good.

But unfortunately God and man are not alone in the garden. The snake is there too. And that fact creates a disturbing paradox to which we must now turn our attention. In the next chapter we shall face the problem, and then attempt to deal with it in those that follow.

A CRY OUT OF THE DARK

If we say that God is one, that He is the Creator of all that is, and that He is good, an immediate paradox confronts us. At least this is so if we add to these characteristics the traditional attribute of omnipotence. If He is *one*, there can be no contradictory elements warring within Him. Unity means at least that. This is the chief point of contrast between polytheism and a radical monotheism. The Greek pantheon, for example, was a projection and reflection of the human struggle with all of its conflicts, competitions, and envyings into the characters of the gods of Mt. Olympus. There can be no such conflicts within the God of the Bible.

How is it, then, that the Greek notion appears nearer to things as we actually observe them? The universe possesses so much that suggests conflict and struggle rather than peace and elemental harmony. To come closer home, if the good Creator is also omnipotent, how does it come about that there is so much evil in the world? Either God is good but impotent (as one put it, "like England's queen, who reigns but does not rule") or He is omnipotent but at least partly evil, in which case the unity of God is called into question.

In the world as we experience it, it is always tempting to question both God's goodness and power. An "act of God," insurance adjusters call it when a man's home and all of his earthly possessions are swept away by a natural disaster. A Texas farmer stood on the banks of a flooded river watching his house, his barn, his stock, everything he had struggled a life-time to accumulate, floating away. The newspaper reporter quoted him as saying, "It was God's will and I don't hold it against Him"—a tolerant and gracious attitude on the part of the farmer, to be sure, but what kind of God is this?

A new mother was told that the baby she had longed and prayed for was hopelessly a hydrocephalic. She turned her face to the wall for a long moment and then choked out between her sobs, "This is God's will for me. This is my cross. I will carry it." What courage in the face of tragedy! But what kind of God wills hydrocephalic babies to lonely mothers? Francis Bacon suggested that it was better to have no concept of God at all than to have one unworthy of Him. In his *Essay on Superstition* he quoted Plutarch as saying, "Surely, I would rather a great deal men should say that there was no such man at all as Plutarch than that there was one Plutarch that would eat his children as soon as they were born."

A young woman had five sons. She was a dedicated Christian, active in her church, thoroughly committed to her faith. Among her prayers was one for a little girl to grace the family circle. Never was there a happier mother than she when the doctor let her see her little girl for the first time—a beautiful child perfect in every way. Six months later the doctor received an emergency call to the home. Going in early in the morning to check the baby, the mother had pulled back the covers to find the infant cold and still. How does one speak to such a mother about the goodness of God? Her faith carried her through, and she still clings to God in spite of it all, but her husband has bitterness in his heart toward a God who gives but also takes away.

A few years ago *Time* magazine told this story:

It was a devout family, and happy in its devotion. The father, Gordon Roberts, 21, was a student at a Seventh-day Adventist college in Madison, Tennessee, planned to become a missionary. The mother, Trannie Roberts, 20, also

went to college, worked nights as a nurse in an Adventist hospital. Each day at 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Gordon and Trannie Roberts held family devotional, cradling their infant son while two-and-one-half-year-old Phillip Roberts joined in the prayers and sang simple hymns.

Late one afternoon last week Gordon and Trannie Roberts, with their sons, were driving home from a visit to a home for handicapped children in a nearby town. Trannie was due on duty in her hospital in 90 minutes; there would not be time for a devotional at home. Gordon Roberts pulled off the highway, the family clasped hands and prayed—among other things, for a safe trip. When Gordon started up again, little Phillip was still on his knees on the front floor-board, singing one of his favorite hymns:

Happy, happy home,
Happy, happy home
With Jesus in the family
Happy, happy home.

Just then, another car, headed in the opposite direction, came over a rise in the highway. The cars crashed head-on. Seven people were injured in the wreck. Caught between dashboard and front seat and instantly killed was little Phillip Roberts, still on his knees.

Two Christian missionaries in India left their wives at a mission compound while they visited believers in distant villages. Returning from their itinerary they found that both of their wives had been murdered in their beds. One of these missionaries, years later—still the missionary—went to his death in a flaming airplane crash en route to another place of service. The stories could go on endlessly. We all know of similar examples.

A young man came into a pastor's study after four years in a prisoner-of-war camp. Having been reared a Christian, he was now frank in his admission of skepticism. Remembering that the lay press had been carrying articles bearing such titles as "no atheists in fox-holes" and "no atheists in rubber rafts," the pastor questioned his differing reaction to the war. In brief, his reply was that during the four years he had spent in prison camp he had had a great deal of time in which to think things through. The camp was located on one of the home islands of Japan, and during the latter part of the war American superfortresses could be seen over the cities dropping large numbers of incendiary and other bombs on the—by now—largely defenseless populace. As he contemplated the horror of it all, there and throughout the world, he became convinced that God could not exist, or else He was not the kind of God he had

been taught to respect as a child. His words were almost the ancient, "Either He cannot prevent evil, though He wills to—and thus He is impotent—or He can and will not, in which case He is evil. In neither instance does He deserve our worship." *

A modern adaptation of a medieval ballad, *The Virgin Spring*, tells of the murder of a lovely young woman by three herdsmen who then unwittingly attempted to sell her clothing to the girl's father. Horrified, the father slaughters them like the animals they are. Then he rushes through the forest to his daughter's corpse. "God!" the father cries aloud, wrenching his face to heaven, "You saw it! The death of the innocent child and my revenge. You allowed it! I don't understand You." It's an ancient cry, "I don't understand You, God!"

Luther, who was often driven to utter despair by what seemed to be God's desertion of him, spoke of *deus absconditus*, the god who is hidden. Job, having lost his family, wealth, and health, misunderstood by his friends, cries out in his misery, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"

If truth is, indeed, the coherence of all the facts, what possible compatibility is there between the notion of a God who is omnipotent, the Creator of all things, good and one, and the chaos, ugliness, divisiveness, and conflict we see all around us? Few of the questions of man have generated as much intellectual struggle as this.

One ancient answer simply resolved the controversy by denying the monotheistic premise. Later Zoroastrianism (the founder was probably a monotheist) simply said in effect, There are two gods, Ohrmazd and Ahriman, God and Satan—eternally co-existent and in conflict with each other. God avoids any responsibility for evil by simply not being Satan's creator. The struggle would one day end in a fiery victory for God, but that says nothing about origins—only ultimate strengths. Unity and omnipotence come at the end, not at the beginning.

* The dilemma was first set down by Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), who is quoted by Lactantius (c. A.D. 260- c. A.D. 340): "God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?" *On the Anger of God*, chap. 13, trans. by William Fletcher in *The Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans), vol. ii, 1951.

Christian theology largely rejected this notion—especially as it reappeared in Manicheism. Omnipotence was too important a term in the lexicon of divine perfection to be so trivially bandied about. Christian theologians from Augustine on down most frequently avoided the dilemma by denying the reality of evil, either by calling evil a “privation” (Augustine), or a distortion of good and thus no independent entity.

Sometimes they thought of evil as actually a good in disguise. The Middle Ages knew a story about a certain wayfarer who met a monk traveling on a highway. Since both men were going in the same direction, they chose to journey together for companionship and mutual protection.

The first night they sought lodging at a peasant’s home, where they were greeted with warm hospitality. They noted a festive air about the house and were told that the family was celebrating the end of a long-standing feud. The enemy had healed the quarrel with the gift of a beautiful and costly silver chalice, which had been placed on the mantle for all to see.

The weary travelers, grateful for the kindness shown them, settled down for the night. Very early in the morning the wayfarer was startled to see the monk arise and quietly slip the treasured chalice into his bag. As the two continued their journey, the wayfarer rebuked his companion for his ungrateful act, only to be mystified by the monk’s response, “I am only doing as God does.”

The next night they requested lodging at the house of another peasant, where in contrast to their previous treatment they were greeted with open hostility. Only after pressing their great need were they grudgingly permitted a place to sleep on some straw with the farm animals. During the night the wayfarer was further mystified by seeing the monk remove the chalice from his bag and place it on the mantelpiece of this house. “I do not understand you,” said the wayfarer as they began their journey anew. “First you respond to kindness with unkindness and now you leave a gift where no kindness was shown.” Again the monk repeated the words, “I am doing as God does.”

The third night they spent in a large house with a band of men whose chieftain had a small son to whom he was ob-

viously devoted. In the morning the monk approached the leader and asked him to allow the boy to guide them on the next portion of the journey, since it led through a region rarely frequented by travelers and where the path was poorly marked. The father agreed, and they proceeded on their way. After a time they came to a narrow footbridge traversing a deep chasm where raged a wild mountain torrent. At the center of the bridge the monk suddenly turned and pushed the boy to his death in the waters of the chasm. Much distressed, the wayfarer cried out in horror.

"Wait," said the monk. "I am only doing as God does. Let me tell you that which is unknown to you. At the first home where we found hospitality, the enemy who healed the quarrel with a gift was no friend, but an enemy still. The silver chalice had been lined with a deadly poison. I took the gift away to save the good man's life. At the second house where we were treated unkindly, our host was the very enemy who had conceived such treachery."

"But what of this innocent child?" interjected the wayfarer.

"This innocent child," continued the monk, "lived among a band of thieves, and while still innocent would one day grow up to be one of them. I have saved him from a life of evil. You see, I have done as God does." The point of the story being, of course, that what appears to be evil is often only an illusion of evil. It may in reality be a disguised good.

There was once a preacher in Bible Belt country who made a similar point while calling on his parishioners one Sunday afternoon without a necktie and with his collar unbuttoned. He apologized for his unkempt appearance with the explanation that he had developed a boil on his neck, and added that God had sent the boil to teach him patience. At one home a little girl responded, "Then why don't you button your collar so that you may learn more patience?" Which is precisely what the desert fathers in our previous chapter were trying to do. If pain and bodily discomfort is the stuff that saints are made of, then the answer is obvious.

But unfortunately, as we all know, sickness does not invariably produce saintliness, nor hard knocks strong character. Some saintly folk rise above their afflictions, but many are em-

bittered because of them, and no amount of philosophical leg-
erdemain can obscure the fact. The plain truth is that most pain
“hurts like the devil” rather than seeming like a chalice offered
to men by the hand of God to purify their souls—even if the
Bible does say, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” Can
we really stretch logic so as to make the total badness in the
world come out good—without straining credulity to the
breaking point?

The other part of the problem is presented to us by the
Bible itself. Robert Ingersoll, self-proclaimed apostle of infidel-
ity of the last century, is reported to have said after a childhood
session in the woodshed with his father, topped off by a lec-
ture on the terrors of hell fire reserved for impenitent sinners
like himself and some of his friends, “If that is what God does,
I hate him.”

Christian theology has made more than a few embellish-
ments on that hell-fire motif. On its own terms the Bible gives a
much more merciful end point. “Forever” may indicate, in that
connection, a state of finality, a state of no return rather than a
process. But the facts are that some of the “acts of God,” espe-
cially in the Old Testament, appear gruesome. Whole villages
and tribes were put to the sword—men, women, children, and
even their livestock were ordered slaughtered at the divine
command. And these accounts demand some explanation.

Take the story in which Achan violated the divine command
by taking what was forbidden after the conquest and annihila-
tion of Jericho. He even lied about it and, of course, one of the
hardest things to tell is just one lie. But were these sufficient
justifications for stoning to death not only the man but his wife
and children and all of his living possessions? “I do not under-
stand You, God.”

And then there was ancient Uzzah who, when he tried to
protect the “ark of the covenant” so that it wouldn’t fall into
the ditch, fell to the ground, smitten to death, for his pains. Re-
call also the teen-age delinquents who were torn to pieces by
she-bears for making disrespectful comments about a bald
prophet who symbolized the “Establishment” of their day. And
even in the less rigorous climate of the New Testament two
prominent churchgoers fell dead for reneging on part of their

church pledges. Is it any wonder that a small boy (Bruce Barton, in *The Man Nobody Knows*)

. . . sat bolt upright . . . in the rough wooden chair. . . . This was his weekly hour of revolt.

The kindly lady who could never seem to find her glasses would have been terribly shocked if she had known what was going on inside the little boy's mind.

"You must love Jesus," she said every Sunday, "and God."

The little boy did not say anything. He was afraid to say anything; he was almost afraid that something would happen to him because of the things he thought.

Love God! Who was always picking on people for having a good time and sending little boys to hell because they couldn't do better in a world which He had made so hard! Why didn't God pick on someone His own size?

Love Jesus! The little boy looked up at the picture which hung on the Sunday-school wall. It showed a pale young man with no muscle and a sad expression. The young man had red whiskers . . .

Can any kind of sense be made of all this? It admittedly isn't easy to find an explanation that is totally satisfying in all particulars—partly because we do not have all the facts, and those we do have may be somewhat distorted by the telling. Take the case of the ancient prophet who was at odds with King Ahab. (The story is in 2 Kings, chapter 1, verse 9 and onward.)

Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty—

every last one of them! And think of their grieving widows and fatherless children. But there is more. The gruesome thing was repeated. Then a third company was sent. This time the captain begged for mercy and Elijah was instructed by an angel to let them off.

But much later, in the New Testament, Jesus and His disciples stopped at a village in Samaria—recall the tensions between the Jews and Samaritans—but were inhospitably treated

because He appeared to be headed for Jerusalem (something like trying to go to Jerusalem via Jordan in our own day).

And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. Luke 9:54, 55.

Now, obviously, these two occasions are different. But essentially how do they differ from the standpoint of the divine attitude? Do we know enough to say? If God's character is changeless, and He is *one*, and good, then it can only be that the situation is what has changed.

Some would resolve the difficulty by dismissing the earlier story along with much of the rest of the Bible, as mere legend rather than history, but it can also be preserved as symbolic history in the terms of our chapter on symbol. But there's our rub. How can similar symbols point to two such contradictory notions if the God to whom they point is one? Perhaps the former "symbol" is inadequately drawn and requires the clarification of the latter. Following the suggestion that Jesus is the clearest open window on God that we possess, every other window is simply obscured by darker glass.

But there are also other ways of reconciling the old Testament with the New, and we shall now take a look at some of them.

LOVE HAS ITS PRICE

Lessing once wrote of God's "education of the human race." Just as a child grows in his intellectual development, knowledge of God—even openness to that knowledge—is progressive. Some things cannot be said until others have been said first. Some questions cannot be answered before they have first been asked. This means that, as with the developing child, what is communicated must be conditioned to the needs of the level of growth. And if the communication later seems absurd it is nonetheless made necessary by the way things are at the time.

Which of us has not had the experience of trying to pass something along from our adult world to a small child and of feeling frustrated because we really couldn't "tell it like it is," owing to the limitations of the child's language and experience. A father attempts to answer his son's questions about the mysteries of sex with illustrations drawn from the birds and the bees, and knows afterward that he really hasn't said it. The boy grows up and finds out it wasn't like the birds and the bees, and thinks his dad was either a little stupid or deliberately misleading him. Then the boy becomes a man and a father and re-

turns to his own father again and says, "Dad, give me that bit about the birds and the bees again. I need to tell it to Tommy."

There is the open question, of course, of whether God adapts the language to human needs or whether human ears do their own adapting. But the end result is the same. The word is "made flesh" and what cannot totally *be* flesh inevitably suffers in the translation. But in this process of education God's acts in history must keep in touch with the times, or they are not "in history." And if later times and conditions find these acts incomprehensible, it cannot be helped. Later times will have their own contemporary truths.

The miracle of the revelation in Jesus Christ is its timelessness. Transcending the limits of time and space, Christ speaks to all times and everywhere. And if this is so, the problems of the Old Testament we mentioned in the last chapter become less enigmatic if we filter its events through that marvelous life. As we do so, it may be that we shall be better able to discover what *really* took place behind what was perceived by the witnesses to the described events.

Again, our term symbol (event-window) is instructive. The important question for us to ask about an Old Testament event is not primarily "What happened?" but "What does it mean?" What, for example, does that story of Achan mean to us? These things were "written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). At the very least it suggests that no man is an island even in his sin. What we do makes waves that lap on even distant shores, and in our sinking we pull others down with us. In the total annihilation of Old Testament peoples there is the fearsome lesson of corporate sin.

In almost all of those desperate symbol-occurrences in the Old Testament, an accurate portrayal of the human situation comes through more clearly than the full truth about God. Man's state apart from God is tragic in the extreme. God ran a risk in dealing thus with the tragedy, but the clearer truth about Himself would have to await "the fullness of time." In the next chapter we shall look at some of the reasons why. For now we can say that what was done, insofar as we have the facts, had to be done in order to say what had to be said—at the time. Only let us be certain that we understand what in fact

was said, which is another way of asking, "What did it mean?" And, of course, this question also applies to that which will be to many the greatest of all tragedies, the biblical "end of the world."

Those who speak of the "goodness" of evil have a point to make, and this is the first thing we can say about the role of trouble in the divine economy. There are certain values to be gained from conflict and struggle that tend to counter some of the obvious disvalues. Hardness, for example, has often been the stimulus to meaningful effort. How many of the world's worth-while achievements have been brought about because persons felt deprived or insecure, and endeavored to do something constructive about those feelings.

Many of the frustrations of our today's youth so recently boiling over into campus and city violence are a result of things coming too easy rather than too hard. It is not deprivation or poverty *per se*, but meaninglessness and valuelessness that eats at the soul. A generation of spectators (that 17,000 hours the average child has spent in front of the television set by the time he finishes high school has made its mark) rather than participators in life has been robbed of the chance to experience the feeling of worth that goes with personal achievement. And so they cry out—but the cry is, "I am worth-while—I am - I am - I am - I am." "I count - I do - I do - I do." But an older generation is so shocked by the splintering glass, the weird externals and the gutter language that it fails to hear the cry. To the youth of our time it seems that the world has given them nothing worth struggling for, and so they try to create their own.

Even the personal disasters about which men can do nothing are not entirely without some gain—if only as reminders of our finitude. In the next chapter this point will become clear.

But the real significance of what has been going on in the world for so long is cosmic in its proportions, and only in that setting does it make any kind of sense. It has to do with the Creator's purpose in making man, that is, with the value He placed in man over objects, plants, and subhuman animals.

In an earlier chapter it was stated that the essential difference between man and the remainder of creation was his freedom to choose, the freedom to act. Such freedom has

come to mean something different in our time. Out of an effort to reduce behavior to a science, man has been forced into a mold where he does not precisely fit. The old-fashioned notion of freedom of the will makes nonsense, of course, to a view of the universe in which everything above the submicroscopic, electronic level is subject to the principle of cause and effect and is thus analyzable and predictable. But to think of man only in these terms is to ignore what makes him man, his freedom and creativity, which cannot be reduced simply to cause-and-effect patterns, even those of complex psychobiochemistry.

Objects can be acted upon, animals can be acted upon and react, but only man can be acted upon, react, and *act*. This is his genius. This faculty is pointed to in the Genesis statement: "Let us make man in our image." Man shares this quality, in finite proportions to be sure, with the Creator of the universe. Man possesses the ability to do something that does not have to be done, and thus to invest what is done with something of the doer. Freedom is the capacity to become responsible for something, to become accountable, to put one's name, as it were, on an act and say, "It is mine. I did it."

God's primary reason for such a creation had to do with a quality He desired in His universe, love, which could not exist without freedom. This is a statement that calls for some explanation, since there are many kinds of experience to which the label "love" is applied, some of them having to do with myopia rather than freedom. *Love* as a term in English can refer to such diverse feelings as to how one feels about strawberry ice cream, wind in the pines, one's wife, or even God.

Some languages, notably that of the ancient Greeks, provide different terms for the various kinds of love, sexual love, for example, or the love of a friend. They left us one word, which when used by the Greeks was a fairly colorless, ambiguous term, but which becomes notable by having been transformed by the Greek-speaking New Testament writers into man's highest value. The word was *agapē*.

Agapē possesses qualities differing from the common loves of man chiefly in that it presupposes the freedom to choose and act that we have been discussing. Sexual love is not free

even though people speak of “free love.” It has its causes, and if the appropriate, or sometimes inappropriate, factors are present, and there are no contrary inhibiting forces, these causes inexorably produce their effect. Not without truth do men speak of such love in terms of “chemistry” or “biological urge.” The same can be said for the love of friendship (sharing is the cause of fellow feeling) and presumably even for the “love” of strawberry ice cream. All of these consist in “doing what comes naturally”—or even of doing what one has to do.

But love as *agapē* is different. Here love is intelligent. It cares. It is subject to the will, not to the feelings or passion. Those loves cannot be turned on and off at will, but *agapē* love can be. This is the reason it can be commanded, as it is in the command of Jesus to “love thy neighbour as thyself”—and even the enemy. It may be impossible at times to love an enemy in any other way! This love has not to do primarily with feeling, but with care for the other person, concern for his well-being, and commensurate action. It is not mere sentimentality, but *action*. Christ did not merely command that we *feel* warmly toward the enemy, but that above all, we *behave* kindly to him because it is the right thing to do—and because he needs it.

The following are some of the qualities that describe this love. It is principle, not an emotion. It involves intellect and reason. It calculates. It is the accepting of responsibility for another—but above all it is a choice, an act of the will toward another.

It is not, of course, unrelated to warmth and feeling. To calculate is not necessarily to calculate coldly. It is utterly amazing how often love acted upon as a principle is followed by love as an emotion; how often the usual formula “I loved that man, therefore I was good to him,” becomes, “As a matter of emotion I disliked that man, but I was good to him and now I am also fond of him.” The point is that this love is not simply the effect of some cause. It is self-caused, that is, a self caused it as a free choice.

All of which, of course, presupposes the existence of a free self that can cause it. And herein lies a point of inestimable significance to the problem at hand, for freedom of choice always depends upon alternatives between which one may choose.

Even the alternative of not choosing is a kind of choice. One choice is no choice. If God desired *agapē* love in the universe He had to permit the alternative—and that's what the problem of sin is all about. Sin involves choice, and choices have consequences.

But first note what such a creation meant to God. That attribute of divine perfection so dear to the theologians' formulas—omnipotence—becomes limited in its meaning. There is a sense in which omnipotence can have no absolute definition if there exists anywhere anyone who defies God. God's omnipotence is reduced by every creaturely No. It is, to be sure, a self-limitation, since God Himself decided to create creatures who could say No to Him if they chose. But logic demands that both of these things cannot be true at the same time—omnipotence and the creaturely negation of God's power. Presumably, God could eliminate the possibility of creaturely defiance, but He cannot have it both ways at the same time and still be one.

Our original philosophic dilemma—a good, omnipotent God and the existence of evil—we now see was created by the theologians' insistence on omnipotence as a factor of divine perfection. Whereas according to the biblical account God's power was, in a sense, limited by the fact of creaturely rebellion, the Bible looks forward to a day when all of God's creation chooses to love Him rather than to defy Him. At that time God becomes truly omnipotent again, as a product of willed loyalty and allegiance. We are now but witnessing the process by which that state of affairs comes about.

Thus there is an element of truth in that concept of the universe in which conflict and struggle are the terms of an emerging reality. God is not yet fully in charge of the universe, although at some future date He will be. What He is not fully in charge of are the wills of all the intelligent, personal beings in the universe and the consequences that follow their voluntary actions.

That these consequences are so vast in their scope reveals something of the nature of the conflict, including its participants. The apostle Paul alludes to this when he speaks of the contention not "against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this

present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12, R.S.V.), and when he looks forward to a time when "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now" (Romans 8:21, 22, R.S.V.). What emerges ultimately is God's omnipotence—in fact as well as in principle.

The next two chapters will have more to say on this subject, but for now it is only necessary to note that the fact of evil in the world is grasped by God as the means to the end of its eventual elimination. In effect, God establishes goodness by allowing the alternative to have its day and thus to unmask and destroy itself.

But to allow the truth about evil to "out," God must not interfere beyond certain limits—even if it hurts. God's ultimate will must take priority over His immediate, empathetic identification with the sufferer. The innocent suffers with the guilty. This too is the character of evil. If only depraved persons experienced the consequences of their actions, evil would produce an effect somewhat analogous to the experience of pain in the body. Pain-sensitive nerve endings protect our bodies against all kinds of physical disasters. In disease states in which the ability to feel pain is lost or diminished, as it is in leprosy, the body often suffers grave organic damage. For example, the stumps that are all that finally remain of the extremities of lepers are, for the most part, the result of the abuse of them because they do not hurt. Dr. Brand, of leper surgery fame, says that lepers come to think of their extremities as not belonging to their bodies, because of the absence of pain sensation, and they employ them as implements or tools with fearsome consequences. Pain is a protective facility and thus a good.

If only the Ghengis Khans, the Hitlers, and the Dillingers suffered for their misdeeds, it is likely that there would be fewer such persons in the world—but would the service of God be freely given under such circumstances? There is a story coming out of the old days in China of a missionary group that stimulated church attendance by providing free rice to the communicants each Sunday morning. It worked very well indeed—while the rice held out. The expression *rice Christians*

grew out of this story. But God desires allegiance and loyalty (the real basis of His ultimate omnipotence) freely given. This is what love is all about. He will not therefore use coercion to achieve this desirable objective—and there are many kinds of coercion.

Freedom presupposes alternatives. The choice against God cannot be a choice if it compares too poorly with the choice in His favor. And so most of the time God keeps His hands off.

Regardless of how attractive or logical it may seem at the time, the truth about sin is that, ultimately, it is irrational, a surd factor in the universe, and that truth must out. But there is nothing irrational or illogical about sin's consequences. Evil is not a mechanism of protection, only venting its fury upon the guilty. It clouds the lives and tears the hearts of the innocent, as well. It would be impossible, in fact, to conceive of a universe created by a rational and orderly God in which it could come out any other way. Given freedom (the *sine qua non* of *agapē* love) and an agent choosing wrongly and it necessarily follows that someone will be hurt. But it also necessarily follows that he will not be hurt in isolation because no man is an island.

The criminal is executed or goes to jail, and his children go hungry and his wife and mother weep—and God weeps. This truth must also out—including the truth that those consequences may be distant indeed both in place and time. What may have happened long, long ago and far away may still be pushing over dominoes throughout the whole universe. The innocent's suffering is thus part of the price of man's ultimate redemption. The cross says at least this—the big one, as well as all of the little crosses we individually bear.

No portion of the Bible is more instructive with respect to this problem than the book bearing Job's name. The message of Job is that God does not author or will human tragedy—He merely permits it, *for good reasons*. If Job could have but read the first two chapters of the book he might have at least had the comfort that accompanies understanding.

God does bear a positive relation to the suffering good men endure in the world, however. He may, if the sufferer wills, transform the dreadful thing into a blessing. What is essentially destructive can be, if properly related to, the stimulus to values

not otherwise attainable. All of us have known rich souls whose depth of character was not won easily, the lines in whose faces etch out the price of their inner strength. But that pain and anguish could have had the opposite effect. We all know people like that, too. Anne Morrow Lindberg wrote out of the agony of the loss of her infant son, "I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness and the willingness to remain vulnerable." Between them God and trust can make the difference—plus the will to be the victor.

There is another relation God bears to those who endure. He suffers with them. No man who weeps is ever very far from the heart of God. This also is a part of the message of Calvary. The death of the Son of God was an event, but not only an event—it was a revelation of something that was always so. The Bible speaks of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). As soon as there was estrangement, alienation, evil, in the universe, God was on the cross. He participates in every pain and agony, weeps with every tear that is wrung from anguished eyes. It could not be otherwise in an orderly universe.

The theologians were wrong again when they attempted to preserve the divine perfection by denying feelings to God—"the impassible God." They sacrificed His omnipresence on that altar. No suffering soul ever suffers alone. On the cross God pulled back the curtains and showed us what was always so. God is on the cross in the world's tragedy and in every little individual share of it. Emmanuel was to be His name—and that means "God *with* us."

A young minister learned this many years ago as he mourned the tragic loss of his beloved companion. He cried out in his anguish, "God, I don't understand You." And he never did come to understand fully. But he did come to realize that God's tears were mingled with his own, and with that, understanding could wait.

It is of the nature of things that the innocent and guilty usually suffer alike. It is the meaning of the suffering that differs. But sin bears its own brand of tragedy, as we shall see.

STRANGERS IN A GARDEN

In the dialect of the jet age the word *sin* has become a quaint archaism. If it is used at all it is likely to serve as a vehicle for jest or derision. Which only reminds us of the gap between the present and the past, where substitute terms like psychological immaturity, perversion, sociopathology, frustration, hostility, alienation, or even unethical would have been rejected as excusing words, minimizing man's essential cussedness.

Sigmund Freud's friends and progeny have changed much of that. The fairly clear-cut categories of our fathers, the even mechanical objectification with which they discussed sin from their pulpits (and in their woodsheds), fairly wilted before the depth analysts who claimed to see the hidden causes behind perverse and annoying behavior. Sin became transmuted in the new argot into a sickness to be cured rather than an evil to be exorcized. Tolerance and understanding tended to supplant condemnation; and therapy, penitence. And something was sometimes lost in the translation.

Our fathers resisted because explaining seems to explain away, but there was probably more gain than loss. We can now

see that the past was groping for truths but with inadequate instruments. The new insights have helped us to appreciate its intuitive wisdom even while recognizing its excesses and errors. The fathers often spoke better than they knew, and that fact more than atones for the deficiencies in their perception.

Take, for example, their doctrine of original sin. The theologians of the past used the expression in a variety of ways, but for most of them it represented a tainting of the genetic pool (or some spiritual equivalent) by Adam's sin, *the* original sin, which was passed on to his progeny along with their blue or black eyes and straight or kinky hair. As none could escape the genes and chromosomes bequeathed by his first parents, so none could avoid their guilt and depravity. (Even today in some communions infants and even fetuses are baptized as the logical expression of this ancient notion.) Occasionally, rather than a somewhat mechanically inherited guilt, the taint was seen a congenital propensity or tendency to evil that goes with being the children of Adam, early tripping us up so that we all become sinners.

The genetic doctrine of sin inevitably placed guilt strains on the marriage relation since procreation and sexuality are necessarily tied together. "In sin did my mother conceive me." But even deeper it burdened the whole human race with a sense of unworthiness that derived from the mere fact of its being human. Countless children came to learn early in life that they were depraved "little devils" whether they wanted to be or not, and this was a discovery that had grave and far reaching consequences.

There is a measure of truth, however, in the old idea of original sin that can now be stated in clearer and more reasonable terms. To uncover this truth let us begin with *the* original sin depicted in the Bible as taking place in two different locations, in heaven and in the Garden of Eden. It doesn't really matter which one is chosen; the same issues appear in both.

The biblical age of innocence before the Fall is characterized by a harmony of relation between creature and Creator in which the creature gains his meaning and value from his trusting dependence upon the Creator and from his willing accept-

ance of the finite role assigned to him. Sin, in this case *the* original sin, is seen as the creature's rejection of trust followed by an attempt to transcend those limits, to deny his creatureliness. In the heavenly account, Lucifer rejects his creaturely status among the angels and sets out to be "like the most High." (See Isaiah 14.) In the Garden of Eden, Eve is tempted to become "as gods" through rebellion against the limitations she thought were arbitrarily imposed upon her by the Creator (that is, against her conditional mortality and by the symbolic prohibition against the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil).

The heavenly consequences of Lucifer's protest against his creatureliness are not all clear, but the self-sufficiency and independence from God that followed also involved alienation and estrangement from the heavenly hosts. The Bible speaks of "war in heaven" and of the expulsion of the devil and his angels. The Garden of Eden account is presented in more detail, and for those with eyes to see, it is rich with deep layers of insight into the human situation.

The essence of both stories is that creatureliness is perceived by the creature as an inhibition or deprivation rather than the basis of meaningful existence, thus calling the trustworthiness of God into question. Both Eve, and Lucifer before her, became convinced that God did not have His creatures' highest and best interest at heart, and, of course, one who cannot trust in God is left to his own resources, which is roughly what the human story has been all about.

But creaturely self-sufficiency has its price—loneliness and isolation. The lonely and isolated people of earth are those who lack the ability to trust God, themselves, and their fellow men. Man is by nature a dependent animal, his prolonged infancy, unique in the animal kingdom, insures this. Many lesser creatures are virtually ready to make it on their own from the moment they crack their shells or dig out of the sand, but not man. Long after his early period of almost total helplessness, he still needs other people, and is emotionally and mentally whole only when his relations with them are enduring and secure. Compulsive self-sufficiency, going it alone, is nearly al-

ways a symptom and cause of deep-seated hurt, fear, and insecurity.

The consequences of distrust, to repeat, were and are isolation. The Garden of Eden story is marvelously instructive at this point. After eating the fruit, first Eve and then Adam (distrust was contagious then as now) suddenly became aware that they were naked. And what a world of meaning that discovery projects. Ashamed, they hid from each other and from God. Whatever may be modern man's equivalent to the fig-leaf aprons and the trees in the Garden, the point of the story is clear. Lack of trust issues in compulsive self-sufficiency and independence and these in turn lead to alienation, isolation, and estrangement. Only add to these the feelings of guilt and unworthiness that are derived either from the consciousness of responsibility for one's state, or imposed by the rejection of others, and one has the sum of the universal "dis-ease" that eats at the entrails of man's soul.

It is this elemental anxiety that we shall now refer to as the *state* of original sin. *The* original sin resulted in the *state* of sin. It is this state, the consequences of their sin, not *the* original sin itself that our first parents bequeathed to their children. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men . . ." (Romans 5:12).

The elemental "dis-ease" may express itself in subtle and disguised ways, but it always has the effect of extending itself to succeeding generations. Again the Bible has expressed a clear fact of human existence that has been underscored by the depth psychologists. "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, . . . unto the third and fourth generation . . ." (Exodus 34:7). "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). Estrangement, alienation, guilt, self-disesteem, the sin-anxiety of the parents, provide the stick-strewn shambles constituting the nest into which children come into the world—with profound, enduring, and often tragic consequences.

Parents laden with deep feelings of failure, guilt, and unworthiness, alienated from themselves, from each other, and from God, anxious, tense, unable to live with themselves, are

also unable to accept others, including their own children. A father's unresolved, perhaps even unrealized, guilts may lead him to make the exorbitant demands that only serve to internalize feelings of guilt and failure in his sons and thus condition their future behavior. A mother unable to accept herself, possibly because of her own parents' attitudes, may reject her child in turn and express it subtly as overprotectiveness, or more obviously as too early or too rigid toilet training—and the like—and the human burden is passed along. Fallen man has a problem on his hands and he may have it through no immediate fault of his own. He is alienated and estranged, and this is his present state of being human—the “state of sin.”

But much of the human tragedy derives from the fact that man is unable or unwilling to let well enough alone. He compounds the felony with a variety of inadequate and self-defeating compensatory attempts to cope with his problem. From times immemorial these abortive attempts have been called sins.

Take that notorious example, pride (the term is here used in the Greek sense of *hubris*, that is, of thinking more of oneself than is one's due, rather than in the sense of legitimate satisfaction or valuing that one may feel, for example, in a job well done). The question is: Is a man proud because he values himself too highly or too little? And those pride-mark status symbols—does a man flaunt them because he feels important or because of his need to impress the neighbors, or perhaps even himself, with his “true” worth, and thus really because of his feelings of inadequacy?

True worth is its own best argument; it requires no artificial buttressing. During World War I the humorist Will Rogers frequently visited Army camps to provide entertainment for the enlisted men. At one such camp he spent most of the evening making sport of the local commanding officer, to the huge delight of all the soldiers present. The officer, a certain General Anderson, sat in the front row quite unruffled through it all. As the performance drew to a close, Mr. Rogers told the men how greatly he sympathized with them for having to serve under such a “pinhead” so-and-so as General Anderson. Finished, he paused for a long moment and then added, “That just goes to

show that you can call a great general a pinhead and get away with it. But don't ever try calling a pinhead a pinhead."

That old bogey to smooth human relationships, the "superiority complex," may be just that, a bogey after all. People who annoy us with their flaunted superiority often have deep-seated conflicts no one suspects. A student at a Western university was thoroughly disliked by many of his classmates for his air of superiority (not to mention the fact that his scholastic performance was actually superior). But when one of them visited his home for a weekend and heard the young man's mother berate him for letting down the family honor through not having done better on a recent examination (although his was in fact the highest score), a whole new picture came into focus.

And pride can wear a variety of faces. The first meeting of Vigilantius with Jerome at Bethlehem in A.D. 396 is described by a historian:

A narrow bypath leading off from the street, at the spot where the tomb of King Archelaus formerly stood, conducted the traveler to the cell of Jerome; here he found the ascetic clad in a vestment so coarse and sordid that its very vileness bore the stamp of spiritual pride, and seemed to say, "Stand off, my wearer is holier than thou."

E. Stanley Jones, of Indian missionary fame, tells of seeing an Indian sadhu, or holy man, standing naked, covered with ashes, refusing to have his photograph taken because his ashes were not on straight. Jones observed how frequently Indian ascetics chose the busiest street corners on which to lie on their spike beds of self-abnegation.

Pride may appear wearing another face but it is most often a false face covering deep-seated feelings of unworthiness and inferiority, often hidden even from those who wear it. Jane Greer says that when she first broke into the movies and was getting the big build-up she tried to act as though she was eighteen while feeling deep inside like a frightened twelve-year-old. To play the part she put on everything she could—heavy make-up, false eyelashes, falsies, the works—until she didn't dare let a boy near her for fear something would fall off. One of Elizabeth Taylor's husbands recalls how Liz was always at the paintpots, as he called them, trying to look like Greta Garbo, Vivien Leigh, or someone else.

A church janitor found his minister's notes still on the pulpit when he came to clean on Monday morning. Thumbing through them out of curiosity, he was surprised to read a penciled notation in one margin, "Argument weak here, speak loudly." The man who has to drive the biggest car on the block and has to build his house closest to the country club, who has to boast of his higher income bracket or of his kid's intelligence, may not do so because he feels superior but because down deep he knows his "argument" is weak. Pride as a sin is one of man's false attempts to solve the problem posed by his fallen state.

These sins also sometimes advertise themselves as something else, as moral rectitude. These are the sins of moral pride. Jesus told of two men who went up to the Temple to pray. One was an ideal example of established morality whose prayer consisted mainly of expressions of gratitude for the fact that he was not like other men—especially like the other man in the Temple who was a despised tax collector, a profession in those days of Roman domination considered to be not only dishonest but more than a little treasonous. The second man beat his breast and prayed for the mercy he undoubtedly needed. According to the parable, it was the publican who received the benediction of God rather than his impeccably correct counterpart. Why? Because the term impeccable as here used is a human and superficial value judgment. Even the prayer of the Pharisee was a sin—the sin of self-righteousness, of moral pride.

Traditional Christian theology and ethics have referred to this sin as "salvation by works" or "legalism." Both terms refer to the belief that man's basic fallen state can be rectified by the performance of certain good actions, that past guilts can find compensation in present or future good behavior. The fundamental error of this attempt will be outlined in the chapter that follows. But it is based on a somewhat mechanical merit and demerit system of bookkeeping in which figures added to one column cancel out figures in another, providing the possibility of a desirable surplus. This sin generally takes the form of a somewhat negative checklist of sins one does not commit, hopefully providing the sinner with evidence of his righteous-

ness before God and man.

A major difficulty facing this attempt is that the guilt of the "sinful state" is often what is called by psychologists free-floating guilt, that is, due to the nature of its origins, it has no specific reference point. The righteous acts may thus bear little relation to the guilt as actually experienced. The exchange is therefore essentially meaningless. Moreover, even when past misdeeds are clearly recalled as the sources of guilt reactions, present deeds can neither undo them nor wipe their memory away. What's done is done. This is essentially what the apostle Paul refers to in Romans 3:20 when he says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." This is not to imply that penitential acts—the Bible speaks of "restoring the pledge"—have no value. It is only that they have a rather different kind of value, as we shall discover in the next chapter.

Finally, there is the likelihood that the increasing of moral tensions that accompanies the multiplication of the requirements for righteousness will be self-defeating. Instead of relieving the burden of failure, they may simply amplify the experience of guilt by heightening the sense of moral imperative. They may also result in destructive punitive behavior either turned in against the self (masochism) or outward toward others (sadism).

There are other sins—sins of escape. Addiction to drugs and alcohol are fairly obvious escapes from anxiety, loneliness, frustration, and meaninglessness. But there are also less obvious examples such as self-destructive over-dedication to a variety of causes, business pursuits, scholastic "death by degrees," and a host of other things we all know about. The lonely, frustrated wife losing herself in a plethora of women's clubs and bridge parties, hoping to forget for a while the emptiness of her existence; the night people drowning in champagne, hilarious conviviality, and gaiety the aching loneliness of their hearts; the habitués of the casinos of Las Vegas, Reno, Monte Carlo, whose lined faces subvert the false excitement momentarily sparkling in their eyes; the gyrating teen-agers in the turned-on, electronic din of the discothèques; the Don Juans and their female counterparts; the marriage marts and

the next-door divorce mills, these may all be examples of people running away.

Many persons in our time simply cannot endure being quiet by themselves. There are simply too many things about themselves they would have to face in such moments, and so they run. In Budd Schulberg's *What Makes Sammy Run*, after tracing Sammy's egocentric but apparently successful life, he sums up in these words:

Unconsciously I had been . . . hoping to be around when Sammy got what was coming to him. And now I realize what was coming to him was not a sudden pay-off but a process, a disease . . . ; a cancer that was slowly eating him away, the symptoms intensifying: success, loneliness, fear. . . . I thought, . . . You can't have your brothers and eat them too. You're alone, pal, all alone. That's the way you wanted it, that's the way you learned it. . . . All alone in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, . . . till death part you from your only friend, your worst enemy, yourself.

There are still other sin-compensations for our state of sinfulness. Take the sins of inhumanity. Unless one is able to accept oneself, one cannot really be close to any other human being. And there are many ways of keeping one's neighbor at a distance. We do this when we apply labels to him, when we generalize about him, when we treat him as a member of a group rather than as an individual. And labels are easy to apply where there are obvious identifying marks like skin color or unusual behavior patterns such as distinctive religious practices.

It is a fact of human experience that what we can define or label, we can in a sense dominate and control. And what we dominate and control becomes, to an extent, an object in our hands. In the chapter where we spoke of the Creator's symbol taken from time, we noted God's intention to convey the notion of His unconditionality. As time cannot be defined or controlled, neither can God. The attempt to condition the unconditioned, that is, to control it, is always idolatrous. We spoke of this in terms of sin against God. But man sins in a similar fashion against his fellow man. By objectifying him a man may avoid having to encounter his neighbor as a person—and that's, of course, why he does it.

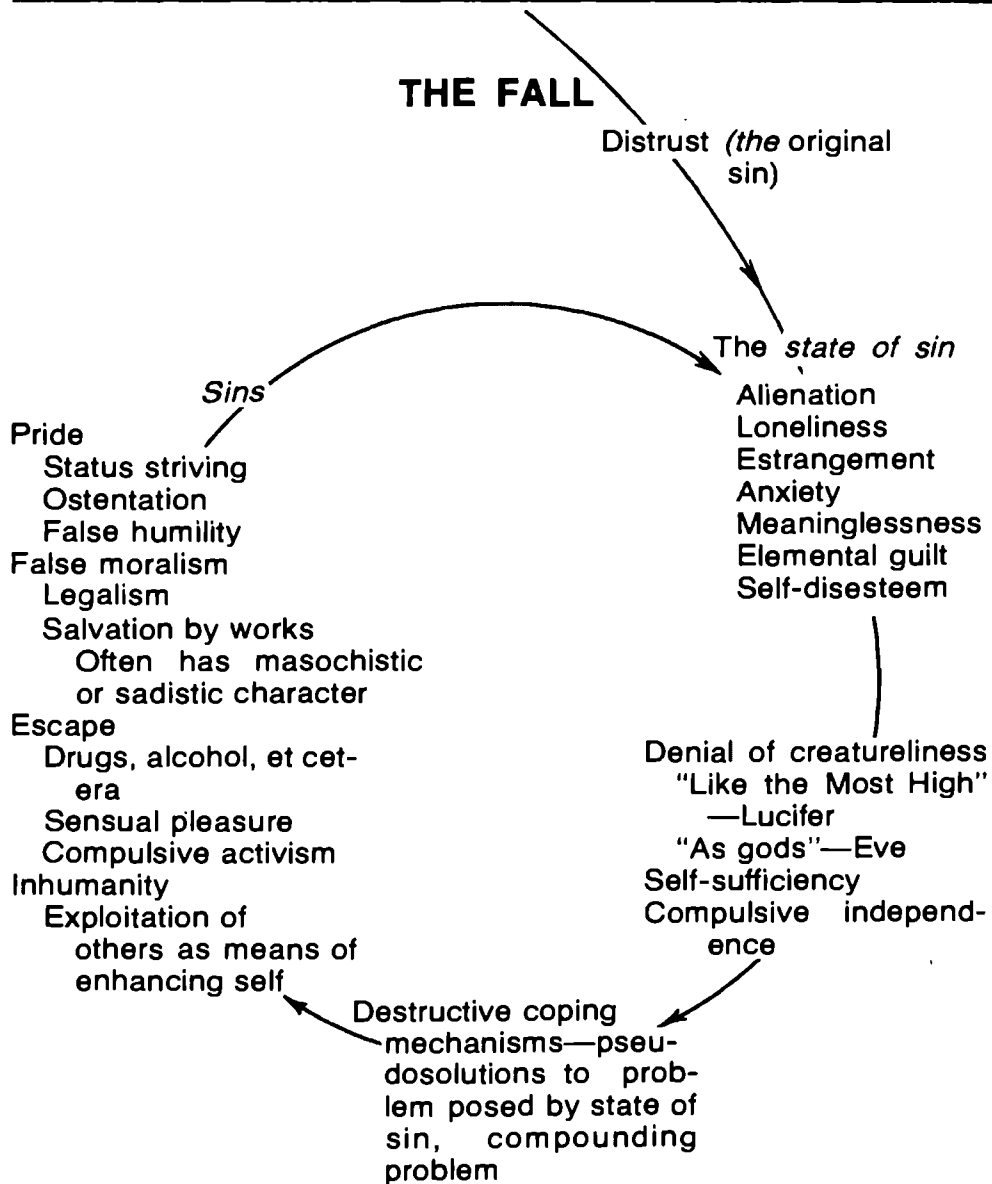
God intended that we should use objects and love persons,

but the sin of inhumanity often reverses the formula into the loving of objects and the using of persons. A person who in marriage simply uses his marriage partner is expressing his inability to come into community with him or her as a human being. The whole of human life has a pall cast over it by man's unwillingness to treat personal life with the respect with which its Creator endowed it. Everywhere employing the Midas touch in reverse, man unhappily turns the gold of human personality into thing.

All of these pseudosolutions to the underlying problem, the state of sin, unfortunately tend only to make bad matters worse. Ostentation designed to promote status, and thus a measure of acceptance by others, most often has precisely the opposite effect. The man who imagines that his more expensive car or his house closer to the country club is going to enhance his neighbor's love for him is in for a rude surprise. That student with his top grades and superior airs was detested rather than accepted. Even the pride-marks passing as humility only drive men farther away. Prideful behavior as a compensation for feelings of self-disesteem and alienation serves only to increase the need for such behavior. The sins of moral pride deepen the guilt and widen the gulf that separates a man from his fellow man, and from his God.

The sins of escape provide escape from nothing. The escapist is finally forced to escape even from his escape—as every alcoholic knows. Running to the bottle eventually becomes a need also to run from the bottle. The Don Juan's thirst is insatiable; it leads only to further self-loathing. After the sensual noise and laughter, the aching loneliness of the night people is deeper than ever. The sin of inhumanity—the “exploitation of others”—but deepens hostility and resentment, increasing the sense of isolation rather than relieving it.

What develops, then, is a vicious cycle (see diagram on page 124) in which the false solutions only compound the problem. Worse, they also constitute the means by which we pass the problem along to succeeding generations. Each of them helps to create the context in which the next generation comes into the world estranged, alienated, lonely, anxious,



The self-perpetuating wheel of sin—self-perpetuating within the individual and from generation to generation.

burdened with self-loathing, feelings of unworthiness and guilt—the state of sin.

Is there no way out of the tragic situation in which man finds himself? Thank God there is. It is the divine will that that which is separated shall be made one again.

THAT THEY MAY BE ONE

The Christian message has always been more than just “agin” sin, to use Calvin Coolidge’s laconic reply. It has primarily had to do with saving people from it. And thereby hangs one of the most intricately entwined tales of theology.

A variety of interesting, and sometimes obscure, notions sprang up during the ages about how this takes place. For the most part these generated under the concept of atonement. We shall not here recount the often fine-spun, sometimes repugnant theories, and the occasional patent nonsense to which the term has been applied in the history of Christian thought. These include various commercial bargains and tricks such as the clever ruse where God traded His Son’s soul to Satan for the souls of the damned. But once having secured the arrangement, Satan found to his chagrin that he could not hold on to the soul of Christ. (The theory reminds us of the rascal who had a good thing going selling homing pigeons.) There was another equally repulsive theory about Christ’s being the bait on the hook on which God caught the devil. Other more serious notions were modeled on social issues of the day such as the ransom demands of North African pirates, or grew out of

the personalities and training of their proponents, as for instance Anselm's juristic leanings and his corresponding satisfaction theory.

During the nineteenth century, proponents of an atonement doctrine based on the Old Testament figure—the Day of Atonement—and the book of Hebrews gave it a wide, even cosmic, scope. They sometimes interpreted the high-priestly activities of Christ in over-literalistic terms that, in effect, pictured God as solving the sin problem by mechanically “pushing celestial furniture around.” The figure is intriguing if one projects the literal Old Testament ritual into the cosmic signification of Hebrews. Its beauty will soon become apparent.

Throughout most of Christian history one enduring formula survived the comings and goings of the various speculative atonement theories. It was based on the Bible statement that sinful man is saved by grace through faith. Unfortunately, like all simplistic theological statements, that formula, too, had its share of ambiguities based partly on the key words *grace* and *faith*. What do they mean? What common thread, for example, can possibly tie together such diverse uses of the term grace as the following: “saved by grace,” saying grace (at meal times), your Grace (honorific title), “full of grace and truth,” and “there but for the grace of God go I”?

Some uses of the word remind us of the mysterious and magical *mana* of the Polynesians or the *sacra* of the Romans. Other uses suggest a kind of divine action—divine selection or election. Grace also frequently seems to refer to a quality of the divine character as in the word *gracious*. (How the word became a title of honor is difficult to imagine.)

As for faith, is it belief—say, like believing in something for which there is insufficient evidence? (Or, as the boy said, “believing in something that ain’t so”?) Or does it involve some kind of blind volitional commitment like Kierkegaard’s leap? And how does it become *the* faith, an organized body of belief and practice? And then, of course, there is the straightforward meaning of faith which is simple and complete trust.

The tangle will appear a bit less confusing if we select those meanings most compatible with our earlier analysis of man’s predicament. They are: grace as applied to salvation refers to a

truth about God—the *kind* of person He is, particularly as this comes through in His saving acts toward men; and faith as something man manifests toward God is, in a word, simple and complete trust. The terms will be so used from here on wherever they appear in this chapter.

To understand how man is saved by grace through faith, let us reconsider that from which he is to be saved. At once we discover that the efforts of human saviors and those of God differ markedly. While God saves man from *sin*, man has, from time immemorial, tried to save men from their *sins* by inquisitions and reformations, by Carrie Nation hatchets, penitentiaries, and by cat o' nine tails and birch rods. The Bible points to this difference when it says, "Man looketh on the outward appearance but God looketh on the heart." *Sins* are always simpler to define and castigate than *sin*, because the symptoms are more obvious than the disease. God does not ignore *sins*, of course, but His chief relation to them is to expose them as pseudosolutions to the deeper problem of *sin*. This is the primary function of the divine law with all of its subtle ramifications. As Paul said, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). God's saving grace goes straight to the heart of the matter. He does not play games at the surface of things.

Recall that the precondition of the original defiant act was distrust. Both Lucifer and Eve chose to believe that God was not trustworthy. The denial of their creaturely dependence on Him derived from the conviction that the Creator was not worthy of such total confidence. Estrangement inevitably followed.

The first step in reconciliation (and atonement can mean, among other things, simply at-one-ment, or the uniting of what was formerly separated) must involve, then, the re-establishment of trust on the part of the creature through a demonstration of the utter dependability of the Creator—that He has the creature's best interests at heart. This aspect of at-one-ment covers the whole sweep of human history and involves also an ample exposure to the alternative to trust. Sin must have its out. But it mainly consists of a continual and progressive, divine self-disclosure. Wherever God has truly appeared in human history this revelation about Him has taken place; you can depend on Him. In contrast, wherever sin has been

present there has been an increase of distrust. The warfare did not end in heaven! Not until all of the questions about God have been finally answered can the eternal harmony be restored.

But God's attack on sin is two-pronged. The first is aimed at re-establishing the creature's faith in his Creator; the second, largely at re-establishing the creature's faith in himself. The first is directed at *the* original sin as it is recapitulated in all men, the second at the *state* of alienation that is its sequel. (Recall that this latter condition was characterized by estrangement, alienation, loneliness, unworthiness, guilt, meaninglessness, fear, and anxiety—the state of elemental psychic disease.)

The gospel, which means “good news,” concerns the fact that man's sin did not alienate God—it only alienated man. It is the good news, as one old country preacher put it, “that God ain't mad at us.” It is the word that lack of acceptance is a problem in ourselves and not in Him. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve saw themselves as naked and endeavored to hide their shame. But God said to them, “Who told you you were naked?” Certainly, God hadn't said it. They had no need to hide themselves from Him!

In Jesus' story the son who left the family homestead to waste his life and inheritance on prostitutes and “riotous living” eventually came crawling back, hungry and ragged, hoping for at least a decent job. He scarcely dared to believe that his father would let him on the place, but instead was astonished to see him hurrying down the road to meet him with open arms, a kiss, and full reinstatement in the family. That's what the good news is all about. The grace, or graciousness of God, is here revealed as His forgiveness, His divine acceptance. “You are not alone,” He says, “I am with you always, eternally. You are of infinite worth to Me.” (The shepherd in the story risked his life for just one wandering sheep. What higher value could he place upon it?) “You are My sons and daughters.” Sons and daughters of the almighty God! “You have no need to be anxious and ashamed. These are the burden of your own imaginings—be done with them. Come. Unload the burden on Me.”

When Jesus was dying He said in the presence of His tormentors, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." If Jesus' self-understanding was valid ("I and my Father are one"), then this must be seen as an expression of God Himself. "Come, I forgive you," He says. "Please, accept My forgiveness." But they would not—and that's about as tragic a thing as can be said about any man.

The good news is that the universe is a friendly place, that God wears a friendly face toward man. Man has not been cut off from God—no matter what! The Scriptures underscore this point. Wrote the psalmist, "Whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Psalm 139:7). John says, "If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1). That word "advocate" (the Greek is *paraklētos*) is an inadequate translation. There is another word closer to the truth, which can equally apply, and that is *alter-ego*—other self. John here calls Jesus "my other self"—one who stands for me. Thus, in a sense, I remain in the presence of the Father in spite of my sin! You cannot drive God away. You are never cut off from Him, never alone. That's the good news about God.

But how can I believe it? That's the problem. How can acceptance and forgiveness become more than just words? The matter of atonement is, in fact, as simple as God's acceptance of me and my acceptance of His acceptance. But unfortunately that's not so simple, as every pastor and therapist knows (not to mention the difficulty involved in getting others to accept my acceptance—for example, the other brother in the story of the prodigal, society and the "ex-con" who has paid his debt). And so at-one-ment costs something. God had to demonstrate that He was with us in the most powerful way possible. My trust does not come easily. God has to assist me.

Partly He does this by letting me in on the action. Knowing that we are flesh, God does not simply throw away my fig-leaf apron, leaving me bare. In the Genesis story He provided more durable garments to cover man's nakedness. God replaces my false solutions with more meaningful ways to achieve a sense of worthwhileness. Said Jesus, "Whosoever will be chief among you [pride], let him be your servant" (Matthew 20:27). Serving others is a legitimate way to cope with feelings of

meaninglessness and self-disesteem. The Bible also speaks of making wrongs right, of "restoring the pledge" as part of the process of restoration, of freeing one from the state of guilt. There is an element of truth in the idea of penance, even if it has sometimes been lost by distortion.

In addition, there are certain symbolic aids to my restoration as one who trusts God, that is, one who allows God to take priority in my life. This was surely the original function of the Sabbath (as it may well have been, in a more limited sense, of that other tree in the Garden). As a reinforcing aid to faith the Sabbath can still play this role. The consecration of one's material wealth to God in the form of tithes and offerings is another such symbolic activity. New Testament baptism and the communion meal were also intended to aid faith.

For the most important symbolic aid to trust, however, we shall have to turn back to the Old Testament Day of Atonement for the divine model. Some familiarity with the Old Testament tabernacle and Temple rituals would help here. In briefest outline, throughout the year the penitent Israelite would symbolically transfer his sins to the wilderness tabernacle, and later the Temple, through the sacrifice of various animals. Once a year, on the tenth day of the seventh month in the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur, the high priest would carry out a special ritual reserved for that day. It consisted of taking two goats and selecting between them by casting lots. The one was ceremonially slaughtered and its blood taken into the most sacred enclosure of all, the most holy place in the tabernacle or the Temple, where it was presented before God. Finally in the Temple court all of the sin-guilt which had symbolically accumulated in the sanctuary during the year was placed on the head of the other goat, called the scapegoat, which was then led out into a desolate spot in the wilderness from which he would not be able to return to the camp.

The symbolic value of all this to ancient Israel seems straightforward enough. Yom Kippur amounted to an annual catharsis in which the sin-guilt of the community could be externalized and divine forgiveness confirmed. The ceremony was thus an aid to faith.

Unfortunately, the Day of Atonement ritual could also be

transmuted into a pagan appeasement of an angry deity, or even the literalistic mechanics suggested by the following story:

A certain Ibrahim Ben Ezra who possessed thirteen perfectly-matched white goats, every one without blemish, was asked by the priests to supply two of them for the annual ritual. He felt honored and did what he was asked, though at the same time he was saddened by having to part with his goats. Ben Ezra was present at the solemn ceremony, and lingered awhile at its conclusion. Toward nightfall he made his way home again and went out to care for his eleven remaining goats. To his horror there were twelve! What does one do with a scapegoat that refuses to play the part and go away? Then, and now? Would they have to go through the whole bloody business again lest some in the community continue to feel unclean? Perhaps, but would God demand it or would their inability to trust require it?

The New Testament supersedes this ceremonial system of types with a cosmic conception of the process in which Jesus is both the slain animal—the Lamb of God—*and* the high priest. But both the Old and New Testament atonements were intended to accomplish the same ends, albeit that of the New on a more impressive and more effective scale.

Just as in the ancient ritual the guilty penitent is able to place his sin on the head of the offering, his sin dying as it were with it, so the penitent coming to the cross sees both the measure of his sin and participates in its erasure. Identity with his guilt is achieved by the realization that no single individual or individuals were solely responsible for the horrible deed. Even today, two thousand years later, as he beholds the Messiah's agony he must know that only an accident of time and space prevents him from abandoning Jesus along with the disciples, and from shouting "Crucify him" with the mob.

But then the figure shifts and the penitent dies with Him through identification, thus paying the price for his sin—and is resurrected with Him at the dawning of the new week. Identifying with the death of the Lamb of God, his alter-ego, the sinner, now cleansed, accepts his acceptance, and ascends with Him to the presence of God where estrangement is overcome

by at-one-ment.

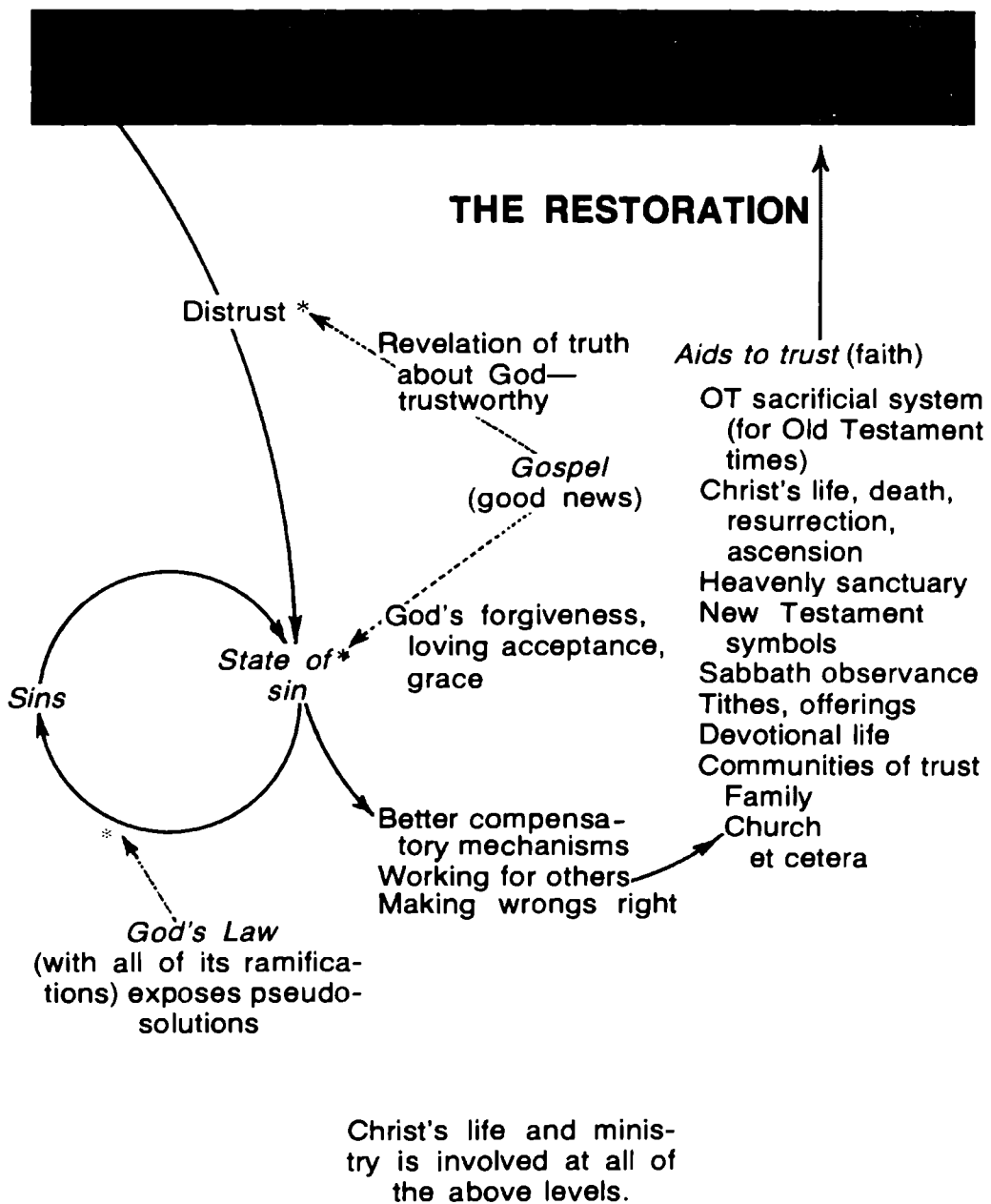
All of this can be, and has been on occasion, interpreted in quite mechanical terms—like the scapegoat who wouldn't go away—but this is a perversion. The central event in the at-one-ment, properly understood, is the possibility it opens up for faith. In this figure, so grossly misunderstood throughout much of the history of the Christian church, God has used the most powerful implements at His disposal to break the chains of man's alienation and restore him to Himself as one who is free from the state of sin, free to trust.

God, to repeat—in contrast with human efforts—primarily directs His saving grace at sin itself, the real problem, not merely at the sins that grow out of that state. When a man discovers, and truly accepts, the fact of his oneness with God—at-one-ment—his own false solutions, his sins, become unnecessary as compensatory mechanisms. Pride disappears for he has no need to escape from himself. He cannot be lonely when life is full and complete. He is not inhuman toward his fellow man, for this self-acceptance eliminates the need to belittle and to use him. After at-one-ment moral rectitude is not a means of earning God's grace, but an expression of one's acceptance of grace freely given.

Moral goodness on these terms is a description of the way a relaxed, self-accepting, worth-while person behaves when he is true to himself. At-one-ment thus also means that a man who was formerly divided is *at one* with himself. What God did makes this all possible.

God has woven other aids to trust into the fabric of the human situation. These also play a part in the process of at-one-ment. We learn trust in God as we experience trustworthy people. The child who discovers his parents to be dependable and worthy of his confidence, and who feels secure in that knowledge, has gone a long way toward learning to have faith in God. The prolonged human period of infancy was designed by God for just this purpose.

Marriage was intended by God to be a trust encounter. This most intimate of human social experiences—the Bible speaks of two becoming one—in which two people bare their souls to each other along with their bodies, was created to anticipate



* God strikes at the perpetual wheel of sin at these points.
Compare with diagram on page 124.

faith and to prepare men and women for it.

There is also the community of trust. The Bible speaks of the church as “the household of faith.” The community of faith was called together by God to be the setting where, learning to trust one another implicitly, men might also learn to trust God.

But the dissolution of the home and the subsequent deprivation of the children of their secure beginnings, the shattering and trivialization of sex and marriage, and the man-made divisions and conflicts that have been the shame of the Christian community in its larger, as well as its smaller, dimensions, have largely robbed these institutions of their *at-one*ing potentials.

But sharing in the divine action, these too may be redeemed and largely restored to their intended function. There is undoubtedly some such significance in Malachi’s assurance that preparatory to the coming of the day of the Lord Elijah would appear, turning “the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6). Man’s social interactions too may share in *at-one*-ment. (See diagram on page 134.)

Perfect *at-one*-ment, according to the Bible, remains yet for the future in the full realization of the kingdom of God. But the kingdom of God is already at work today healing the wounds that separate men from God and from one another. Insofar as men now achieve a measure of *at-one*-ment with God they experience a foretaste of that which is yet to come. But it is important that we see this foretaste as a symbol pointing to that eventual reality. The future atonement rests heavily upon the present. The present is pregnant, as it were, with the future. Only, however, as *at-one*-ment is experienced now, even if only in partial measure, does the future truly become fulfillment.

Let us now turn to that ancient future hope, the atonement consummated—first in a presence and then finally in a place.

THE GOD WHO COMES TO MAN

Few Christian teachings have suffered more from the intellectual sophistication of our time than a belief in the literal second coming of Jesus Christ. The doctrine has strained the credulity not only of those who have difficulty with religious belief in general but also of many within the Christian church whose faith otherwise remains largely intact.

Contrast this with the crucial role this hope played in the life of the primitive Christian church. Lying at the very center of its deep commitment, this hope undergirded its values and highest aspirations. Indeed, one can scarcely imagine the early church as even surviving, let alone evangelizing the Western world, had it not expected its Lord's momentary return.

The anticipation was based, of course, on Jesus' own promise, "You must not let yourselves be distressed," He said, "you must hold on to your faith in God and to your faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's House. If there were not, should I have told you that I am going away to prepare a place for you? It is true that I am going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am" (John

14:1-3, Phillips).

And on that fateful day when He was taken away from them (again listen to Phillips' version of the account): "When he had said these words he was lifted up before their eyes till a cloud hid him from their sight. While they were still gazing up into the sky as he went, suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them and said, 'Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This very Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will come back in just the same way as you have seen him go' " (Acts 1:9-11).

To the very end of that first century their hope remained strong. The writer of the last book of the Bible was still able to say in his time, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him" (Revelation 1:7).

At first, they expected the event so immediately that they suspended business as usual, living by sharing the community's savings. It was even suggested by some that such practices as marrying and rearing families were inappropriate in the face of Jesus' soon return. Their common greeting as they met was *Maranatha*, The Lord is coming. This was the undercurrent of their every activity.

But alas, the centuries slipped away, and all too quickly *Maranatha* was transmuted into "that far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves." And faith became grounded in other things and other events, as it could not resist the mounting skepticism regarding the nearness of *that* event.

There are at least two reasons why modern man has difficulty in maintaining belief in this ancient, central teaching of the Christian church. The first is based upon the above history of that idea—the transition from *Maranatha* to "far-off divine event."

Almost every age has had its zealots who tried to recapture the early feeling of Christ's imminence. Often they were persons who sounded out of place in their time, as strange voices. Sometimes those voices gave rise to movements such as the Montanists in the early centuries or the Millerites in our own time. There have nearly always been "adventists" of one sort or another, basing their calculations on a special reading of the

times or of the Scriptures, the mysterious numbers and figures in the books Daniel and the Revelation. But with each new expectation and each disappointment the Advent idea receded more and more into the background, and skepticism about the event, which was already apparent by the end of the first century, crystallized into a concern for getting along in the world.

The Advent hope was at first resisted. Recall the words of the writer of 2 Peter 3:3, 4. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." These words were written by one who thought of himself as living in those last days.

Could it have been otherwise? Was it possible to maintain a belief in a promised event that failed of fulfillment as the years, the centuries, even the millennia, rolled by? Listen to the pathos and disappointment in the voice of a retired leader in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, who some years ago stood up in a meeting of Adventist ministers and requested permission to speak. "Brethren," he said, "when I was a small child I heard my mother speak of Jesus' return. I asked her, 'Mother, when is Jesus coming?' She replied, 'Surely in not more than five years, my child.' When I was ten years of age I asked her again, 'When is Jesus coming, Mother?' Again she replied, 'Surely within five years, my son.' When I was fifteen I asked again, and again she gave me the same answer. Then I was twenty, twenty-five, thirty—'Surely in five years.'"

The aged man's voice trembled as he turned to the assembled ministers. "Now, my brethren, I am old, and my Jesus has not come." How does an old man, or an old church for that matter, retain the unrequited faith of his—or its—youth? The repeated disappointment of expectation has long been a major reason for disbelief in the Second Coming.

The second reason is distinctly a sophisticated child of our time, the offspring of a changed world view that has rendered the literal event incredible to many. One is reminded of ten-year-old Johnny who, coming home from Sunday school, was

asked by his mother what he had learned that day. "Well," he replied, "our teacher told us about when God sent Moses behind the enemy lines to rescue the Israelites from the Egyptians. When they came to the Red Sea, Moses called for the engineers to build a pontoon bridge. After they had all crossed over they looked back and saw the Egyptian tanks coming. Quick as a flash, Moses radioed to headquarters on his walkie-talkie to send bombers to blow up the bridge and save the Israelites." "Johnny!" exclaimed his startled mother, "is that really the way your teacher told that story?" "Well, not exactly. But if I told it her way, you would never believe it."

Consider the apparently fantastic terms in which the doctrine of the second advent is expressed in the Bible. According to the New Testament, Jesus told His followers that He was going away to His Father's house to prepare a place. When He left them He simply rose up bodily into the air and disappeared into a cloud, and thence presumably on into heaven to make rooms ready for His guests, after which He had promised to return, riding on clouds, visible, tangible, all eyes watching the event, to gather them up "to meet the Lord in the air" as Paul describes it in his first letter to the Thessalonians (chapter 4, verse 17). Finally, He would transport them away with Him to the place He had prepared.

All of this was believable enough in the prescientific first century, but what of our own? Think of what this picture involves. The event is seen, experienced, and thus occurs within the absolute range of man's experience—limits apparently imposed by the speed of light. Nothing man can physically experience, certainly nothing he can see, appears to transcend that absolute limit. Matter, we have been told, cannot even exist as matter at speeds at, or exceeding, that limit.

If these observations are correct this means that anything that can be seen or physically communicated by, or to, man can have no greater rapidity of motion. Given, then, a universe such as we know it and a bodily person, a cloud—even a cloud of angels that can be seen by everyone, and movement from someplace "out there" called heaven to "down here," of something material enough to be visible—one has a problem

on one's hands, particularly if one should think of heaven as being situated somewhat centrally in the known universe.

Our known universe extends something like 20 billion light-years from one edge to the other. From modern man's point of view this means that if God or His Son is visible, and thus within the limits apparently imposed upon us, and dwells at the center of the universe, it must take Him 10 billion years to communicate with the outer fringes of His creation. The earth itself would have to be millions of years old before God could even know of its existence, if the laws of nature we know about operate elsewhere in the universe. Even if one moved heaven much closer as a place, say on the other side of the Orion nebula, within the limits of man's knowable universe, to transport even pure energy that distance, let alone material bodies, would take fifteen hundred years. On these terms God, in heaven, would just be learning about the breakup of the Roman Empire and the rise of the papacy. And Jesus, to ascend to such a place and return, would not be able to do so until the year A.D. 3200, even if He were pure energy and not a risen body!

Considerations such as this have caused many Christian thinkers simply to abandon some of the categories and metaphors of the New Testament. They have found it makes more sense to think of going to heaven not as actually going *to* some place, but of entering another, spiritual, dimension of reality existing alongside of, or within, this physical one, with which it does not interfere. To them heaven is certainly not some place out there from which a Person comes bodily to receive a multitude of bodily persons in order to transport them back with Him. And, of course, many others dismiss the whole notion as a mythological speech figure.

The question is, "Can an intelligent person in the latter half of the twentieth century still believe in the literal message of the New Testament, the ancient faith of the church, relating to the return of our risen Lord?"

Let us examine the two stated objections to such a belief. The first is not too difficult to deal with if one reflects on the character and nature of the divine Person involved. The Scrip-

tures portray Him as being both patient and compassionate. Note the words of 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He is in no hurry! He is also not laden with the burden of our time considerations. Verse 8 says that with the Lord "one day is . . . as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In God's eternity, the whole of human history is but a drop in an astronomical bucket. It is rather we who are impatient. Life slips through our fingers at a disturbing pace.

Let it be recalled, however, that the Second Coming as an event is always both immediate and urgent regardless of the time in which a man lives. In the light of the Bible teaching regarding man's unconscious sleep in death, each man is as close to the event as were the prophets and apostles of old. The last conscious impression is instantly succeeded by the next, that is, the resurrected consciousness of the coming of Jesus. Thus every man lives but a heartbeat away from the Second Coming—at least in terms of his awareness of it—whether he lives in the first or in the twentieth century.

The other barrier to belief is more difficult to deal with unless we remind ourselves that it results from an imposition of our limitations on reality. Admittedly, there are absolute limits to our experience of reality. But this by no means implies that reality itself is so limited. Science itself is far less certain about such matters than it once was. In a lecture at the University of California some time ago the renowned physicist Edward Teller was describing the astonishing progress that science has made since World War II. "Practically everything that for years we believed to be true has been proven false or incorrect by subsequent discovery," he said. "In fact, there is only one statement I would now dare to make positively: there is absolutely nothing faster than the speed of light—maybe." And now we are hearing of tachyons, particles as yet undemonstrated, that just might be faster.

The Scriptures speak of categories and qualities that must of necessity transcend the limits of time and space as we know

them. Such terms as “out there,” “up there,” “down there,” reflect the human point of view and limitations. They are not necessarily limitations imposed upon God. A skepticism that derives from human limitations may bear little relationship to what is ultimately real.

The Bible as it talks of places also refers to God as a universal presence. Jesus spoke of going away to prepare a place for His followers, but He also said, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). God who dwells in heaven is also the God who is eternally and universally present to every man in every place. Said the psalmist, “Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:7-10).

It should be obvious that the modern dismissal of the second coming of Christ is part and parcel of its rejection of the old god who was simply not up to the universe as we now know it. It shares in the jettisoning of that “superstition” and its replacement with the “gods” of the contemporary world-view.

But what if God were *God*, not *god* or “*god*”? Such an event would then constitute not a description of the time-space limitations of the one who comes (*god*) but of those of the man to whom He comes. God who is already *with* us “comes” for man’s sake, so that man can experience that fact more fully. The Second Coming is another example of the Word being made flesh, of God’s communication with man on man’s terms, in man’s language.

The Second Coming is an event acted out “in history” as a divine accommodation to human comprehension, and thus as in our earlier examples—the Creation and Incarnation—a true symbol, pointing beyond the objective reality of the event to truths transcending it. The event, then, really ought to be faced with the question, “What is God trying to tell us by acting in this way? What does it mean?” (the theological question) rather than “How does it happen?” or “When?” (the historical

question). Almost all of God's actions in history are in this sense symbolic, conveying truths that transcend the description of the acts themselves. No single historic event can confine the One who is greater than all the events of time and eternity. The event or act, if it is to be perceived by man, can contain no more than a shadow of the divine Actor who reveals Himself in this way. This event in human history is no exception.

Suppose we ask of it then the theological question, What does the second coming of Jesus mean? Why does God act in this way?

Since it is a theological question we should not expect its total answer so as to be easily and readily apparent, but among the things it means is, first, that the Second Coming is about God, the God who "comes." The God of the Bible is no distant, splendid, but immobile statue. He is the God of creative activity—as His entire universe amply attests. The God of the Bible is the God of loving action. The Second Coming is about the One who *comes* in history at a point in time as Jesus promised, but also One who *ever comes*. And make no mistake about it. That event in history is as certain as Jesus is trustworthy. That great event of the future points to an eternal truth about God's nature. It is God's nature to come to man.

Second, the Second Advent tells us something about history. (The term *history* here and above refers not only to the usual "what happened" or "facts about the past" but also to history as the realm of time and space.) Jesus comes to *this world*. He enters man's sense experience as an object in time and space to be sensed, just as at His first coming He was seen and handled. Things of the body—matter, energy, space, time—are not meaningless to God. Surely this is the message of the biblical doctrine of the resurrection, where man is seen to have no existence apart from the body. This is the real basis for the Christian doctrine of physical health. The redemption of man includes the redemption of his body. It is also the meaning of the doctrine of heaven as a place, the subject of our next chapter. The whole man, including bodily man, who as a creature of

God was pronounced good at the Creation, is redeemed from the Fall and is received at the coming of God, is taken to a place appropriate to his space-time creatureliness.

God is concerned about things in time and space. He takes “history,” the realm of body, of things, of time and space, seriously. The Second Coming is an affirmation of history, not its negation. Space and time are not the consequence of the Fall, as Plotinus suggested. The Second Coming reminds us that when God finished His creation, when He made “history,” He said, “It is *very good*.”

What this implies to the Christian’s evaluation of the world should be obvious. God who affirms the world while He transforms it thus sets the pattern for Christian social concern. The follower of Christ is not to be characterized by his longing to escape to some other kind of spiritual existence, away from his body, away from the world. He knows that his God is interested in redeeming and renovating this time-space frame that men call history—not in destroying it. “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.” To repeat, God takes “history” seriously.

Third, the doctrine of the Second Coming is about man. It is about the appropriate posture of the Christian toward his God—a posture of expectancy, of eager anticipation. This may be a novel concept to those who think of Christ’s return in terms of arrival, or the end of something, the end of the world. But this is to miss the doctrine’s most important point. The Second Coming is not the end for the child of God, but really the beginning.

The posture of the seed of Abraham is that of those who are pilgrims eternally seeking a city. Note this attitude in the words of E. G. White: “Truth is progressive. The earnest seeker will be constantly receiving light from heaven.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Joshua 24:27. See this truth also in that marvelous description of the hereafter in the dramatic finale of E. G. White’s *The Great Controversy*:

There, immortal minds will contemplate with never-failing delight the wonders of creative power, the mysteries of redeeming love. . . . Every faculty will be developed, every capacity increased. The acquirement of knowledge will not weary the mind or exhaust the energies. There the greatest enterprises

may be carried forward, the loftiest aspirations reached, the highest ambitions realized: and still there will arise new heights to surmount, new wonders to admire, new truths to comprehend, fresh objects to call forth the powers of mind and soul and body. . . . With unutterable delight the children of earth enter into the joy and the wisdom of unfallen beings. They share the treasures of knowledge and understanding gained through ages upon ages in contemplation of God's handiwork. . . . And the years of eternity, as they roll, will bring richer and still more glorious revelations of God and of Christ. As knowledge is progressive, so will love, reverence, and happiness increase. The more men learn of God, the greater will be their admiration of His character.—Pages 677, 678.

The dying words of Civil War General Stonewall Jackson, "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees," is far from being an accurate picture of the biblical hereafter.

Among the reasons for man's disappointment regarding the Second Advent may be the fact that he expected an end-point, rather than learning to wear the face of one who lives in expectancy of greater life to come. The pilgrim posture is an eternal way of life. This is what it means to be of the seed of Abraham. Never in eternity will man "arrive" with no further place to go.

The Adventist posture, if adopted now, prepares and equips man for life in the future. God, to repeat, is the One who has come, will come, and will forever keep coming to man. In eternity man will always be questing, always anticipating, always expecting some new experience from God. Eternal expectancy! Ah, but not empty expectancy. His coming is always prelude rather than finale, prelude to something greater. Expectation of the event, now no longer far off, toward which all creation moves, is the preparation for that larger, eternal way of life.

Unfortunately, out of concern for the time of the event, Adventists have often largely neglected these and other meanings which have so little to do with time. What they have wanted to know is not What does it mean? but How? and When will it happen? The former of these they probably wouldn't understand, anyway, and the latter it was not for them to know, except relatively. Recall how, in response to the disciples' question "Wilt thou at this time . . . ?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know."

Signs of the times are, of course, useful as expressions of and reinforcement of this essential attitude of expectancy. While we are referring to signs, it might be well to observe that for the first time in history one of the major preconditions suggested by the Bible for the Second Coming now exists—*the whole world*. Never before has it been possible for issues to be really universal in their scope. There are no longer any truly isolated pockets of humanity. It is now technically possible for virtually every man, woman, and child on earth to experience any event or issue simultaneously. Communications technology has placed every man in everybody else's back yard. Nothing important happens anywhere but what can be known almost instantly everywhere. And this is what is most different about our day.

Think, if you will, about it, and you will understand how truly significant that fact is. The things our fathers looked for were quite impossible in their day, however ignorant they were of that fact. But they are not impossible in ours. Again, however, we must not allow this fact to change our posture of ever-open expectancy to one of anticipation of "the end." To the one who looks for it the event is no end, but a beginning, or rather an unimpeded continuation of what has already begun.

The doctrine of the Second Coming, like all other teachings regarding God's acts in history, must be approached with the proper question. The question regarding God in history is not only What happened? or, What will happen? It is also the question, What does it mean? The Second Coming means, first of all, something about God. God is the God who comes. He is divine Person, eternally, lovingly, creatively active. Second, it means something about the world. God comes to man. God takes man's world—time, space, things—seriously. The Second Coming is not about the end of time and space, but its redemption. Third, the Second Coming is about man. It is about the appropriate posture of the spiritual seed of Abraham. It is about anticipation, expectancy, the posture of the pilgrim who forever seeks a city.

Until Christians have learned what the second coming of Christ *means*, the event as something *that happens* may con-

tinue to be delayed. Recall the expression with which the early Christians greeted each other—*Maranatha*—the Lord is coming. When His present followers rediscover that expectancy, that hope, as a way of life, then only will eternity break into and give value and meaning to their “history.”

AT-ONE-MENT IS ALSO A PLACE

The words of that old Negro spiritual, "Everybody talkin' 'bout heav'n ain't goin' dere," make little sense in today's world where nobody's "talkin' 'bout heav'n" and where the major problem is not so much the hypocrisy suggested by the song as it is frank disbelief. Utopias, including the traditional kind, went out of style long since, dismissed both by modern skepticism and by the tragic international upheavals of the past fifty years.

Man has become so preoccupied with the process of survival that he has lost the notion of arrival. The process has itself become the end and, consequently, to many even this has ceased to be worth while. The survival of every means depends upon the viability of the end it serves. Which is another way of saying, If life has lost its purpose, if it has become "a restless child to be played with until it falls asleep," then what's the point?

In an earlier period when the Bible was taken far more literally than it is now, it was quite different. For surely the Bible is one of the most utopian of man's historic documents. From one end of the Bible to the other, history displays a linear qual-

ity. It neither meanders nor goes in circles, but points in one direction—to a time when things that are now not so good will be better. The prophets, when they were not convulsed with weeping over the state of their contemporary situations, were prophets of hope, prophets of the bright forward look, bright at least for the elect of God, who would listen to their exhortations and repent.

Isaiah prophesied of a time when—

the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. . . . And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. Isaiah 35:1-8.

And again,

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. . . . And the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. . . . And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: . . . and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord. Chapter 65:17-25.

And,

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. Chapter 66:22, 23.

The writer of 2 Peter looked ahead to a fiery destruction of the present state of things, followed by a restoration: “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

John, the writer of the last book of the Bible, the Revelation, depicts in vivid, poetic detail “a new heaven and a new earth” where “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying,

neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:1, 4). Almost the whole of his final two chapters is devoted to this revelation.

In more political and less poetic terms, the prophet Daniel describes a vision in which, at the end of a succession of earthly kingdoms, "the God of heaven [shall] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: . . . and it shall stand for ever" (Daniel 2:44).

The prophets were frequently sensitive poets splashing words with artistic skill and often with arresting results. Symbols were their tubes of paint. But it is extremely difficult not to assume that at least some of this was intended to be taken at face value even if modern Christian theology has not been kind to such an assessment. Utopias are apparently out of style in theology as they are elsewhere.

Another kind of "kingdom of God" motif has, however, enjoyed a much heartier reception. It is motif that can be endorsed by all kinds of prophets of social betterment and interpreted in ways quite at home in our modern intellectual climate. And there is a truth in this largely post-biblical interpretation. Jesus Himself referred to the kingdom of God not merely in last-day temporal terms, but as present now and at work in the world. Wherever God is at work, there is His kingdom. (In the chapter on God as the Creator, it was emphasized that it is essential to the monotheistic premise that supernature and nature not be categorically isolated from each other. There is no place, time, or event that occurs "outside of" God.)

The kingdom of God is within you, and heaven begins now. The question is, Is that all? Theologians speak of "realized eschatology," meaning that the doctrine of the "last things" refers primarily to present experience. But is that all that is meant by the doctrine of the last things? Is the biblical witness, when taken literally, too utterly fantastic to be true?

The argument against this utopian future is chiefly that it is alien to present human experience. We've seen nothing to date really to prepare us to credit the idea. Always in human history there has been dreaming and hoping and the shattering of dreams and the frustration of hopes. But on the other hand there has been novelty in history also. Who of our ancestors

could have anticipated the present state of things in the world of technology? History records continuity, but it also records discontinuity. And if this is so, the fact that the biblical expectation differs from what we have already experienced is no valid reason for rejecting it.

To be sure, almost the only palpable evidence in its favor is the authority of the persons who have looked for it. (Acting on authority may not be a method enjoying high repute these days, although scientists and others employ it constantly. If they did not trust those who seem to have the right to speak, they could not even begin their investigations. Think of how little would be accomplished if each generation or each individual scientist had to work out the periodic and logarithmic tables all by itself or himself.) How much authority shall we give to the prophets and to Jesus? And if we listen to them can we accept the possibility that they possessed inside information?

Pascal suggested that we should place our wager on the side that makes a difference. If what we have been saying is true, it makes an enormous amount of difference. If none of it is so then nothing ultimately makes any difference. But we are faced here with more than gambling percentages. What we are facing is a moral reaction to a Person who staked His life on the claim that He had the right to speak thus.

But it also has some logic going for it—and I do not here refer to the old “If this is all there is it is pointless. There must be a hereafter to allow for ultimate fulfillment of present beginnings.” Rather, there is nothing essentially contradictory in the notion of the “utopian” kingdom of God, unless, of course, it is conceived of in contradictory ways. The biblical description, allowing for necessary poetic license, does not portray the ultimate state as radically discontinuous from this one. (Monotheism rejects, as we said earlier, radical discontinuities.) It is rather that the elect continue doing what they do now—only better. And doing things better is a familiar human achievement here and now.

Incoherences enter when the biblical monotheistic concept is modified by Greek dualistic notions of discontinuity. The Bible places the hereafter at the end of “time” following the res-

urrection of the body, not as an immediate entry into a “timeless” spiritual world at death (Plato’s realm of the unchanging). The bodily resurrection doctrine of Hebrew monotheism and the disembodied spiritual paradise of the Greeks entered at death, incorporated together into Christian theology, reflect a confluence of two quite different and conflicting conceptions of reality. The Bible necessarily speaks of the abode of the redeemed in spatial terms—terms appropriate to the bodily existence essential to man. Without a body man is nothing. The hereafter is designed for human bodies. The Creator God affirms material substance.

But the expectation of an improved state of things in the future is not what the modern mind finds objectionable in the Christian doctrine of the hereafter. One occasionally hears of negative evolution, or devolution, but in general there is still an undercurrent of implicit utopianism in most contemporary cosmologies. The evolutionary hypothesis itself is distinctly a plant of such Christian soil. What is difficult for the modern mind to accept is the notion that we individually shall share in that future and the Bible picture of how it is that we shall do so.

To be sure, many of the biblical depictions of heaven and the new earth are not quite what modern man has in mind when he thinks of the land of his dreams. But these descriptions *are* of what men in other times and places dreamed. And that’s the point. All descriptions of an unexperienced reality can only project what has been experienced. Heaven is the land of man’s highest aspirations, but even aspirations are not stationary. The variety of picturizations only serves to underscore the symbolic quality of all such descriptions. The hereafter is all about uninhibited, unrestricted (at least by the state of sin) aspiring! In this sense it contrasts radically with the Nirvana of Buddhism—the state of escape from all desire. The Christian heaven is escape only from destructive desiring, not from desire itself.

Do not be limited by the pictures men from the past have painted. They painted the pictures mostly for themselves and for their own times. Norman Rockwell was once criticized for the realism of his magazine cover paintings. “They won’t last,” he was told, “posterity won’t know anything about your

work." "Let posterity paint its own pictures," he gruffly replied. Catch, rather, what the pictures of heaven and new earth symbolize and then fill in the details to suit yourself—and keep filling them in as you grow.

That other barrier to belief is more difficult to breach, that is, how we individually can have a share in the ultimate kingdom of God. Men have usually found Plato's surviving soul concept easier to accept than the biblical doctrine of the resurrection of the body. This is partly true because of its very intangibility. There is so much about ourselves that seems to point in that direction—and so very little in the other. It is not without reason that practically every primitive savage has seen himself in terms not totally unlike Plato's. How else, for example, can the primitive explain his dreams? He retires to his accustomed pad at night and awakens in the morning with his body still in roughly the same spot. He has obviously lain there all night, and yet he has also been engaged in a variety of fascinating exploits in strange and sometimes far-off places while his body slept.

His easiest explanation is that there is a part of him not tied to his body that is quite able to function independently of it. And then there is that strange intuition of the continued presence of the departed that even sophisticated, bereaved persons feel. The savage has, of course, never learned about association factors in recall. In addition there is the impossibility of anyone's really being able to imagine his own dying in the negative terms of total nonawareness. Top these off with man's deep-seated urge to survive, and it is a marvel that anyone ever conceived any other kind of view of death than Plato's. About the only human experience supporting the idea of a resurrection is the experience of awakening out of sleep. (The Bible, interestingly enough, uses the sleep analogy to describe death.)

The idea of a literal bodily resurrection is not so difficult to comprehend, however, if what was said in the chapter on man is true, unless one is committed in advance to the proposition that man has already experienced all possible phenomena. The individual man is in essence the accumulation of things that have happened to him—his memory, plus the creative way he deals with his experience—including how things are remem-

bered. The particulate elements and their reactions composing his anatomy and physiology are constantly in flux, changing from moment to moment. They are therefore not in themselves essential to the definition of a man. Only a continuity of pattern remains relatively constant. Like a flowing river there is constant change, and yet the form of "this particular river" remains identifiable. But the question is: Were there a total dissolution of this particular river and its re-formation so that it exactly corresponded to its previous pattern and place, would we have the same river or another?

What would determine this? The presence or absence of flowing water? Apparently not. There are many rivers in arid parts of the Southwestern United States that have water running in them for only limited periods of the year and sometimes none, except under unusual conditions occurring once in several years. And yet these rivers' identity remains. Their continuity is maintained by factors external to the river itself—signs, maps, the memories of people.

If we use this analogy, all that is required for the resurrection of an individual man is a preservation of a pattern somewhere (in the mind of God, Christians believe) and its re-establishment as a "living stream" at some point in time. The pattern or form is the essential quality of the man, not the moving stuff of his composition.

Face it, the real question here, as before, is whether God has a mind. Again, is God god, "god," or God? If He is God, and the Creator of the astounding cosmos we are catching tantalizing glimpses of, both in the infinitely large and the infinitesimally small, and aware as the term *person* implies, the resurrection is neither impossible nor particularly irrational. It simply has not been a matter of general previous experience, that is all.

The early Christian church believed they had seen it occur and consequently had little difficulty anticipating their own. Christ's resurrection was filled with promise for the future. Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:19, 20; read the whole chapter).

The fact that utopias, at least on the heavenly scale, have gone out of style in the modern world is an index to the depth of man's existential despair. Utopian dreams have often been the product of man's this-worldly frustration, but modern man's present experience of himself and his world has almost wiped away even the possibility of dreaming.

To his credit man has appeared to show great courage—facing up to his despair and refusing to indulge himself with soft illusions. But is this a mark of bravery or a sign of his having surrendered to apparent futility? Despair that can produce dreams can deepen into the despair that feeds only on itself. But perhaps it is only that the nature of his dreams has changed—that he has different kinds of illusions.

The message of the Bible is a message of hope for the despairing. It is a message about God who is one, the Creator, and who cares very much about His creation. He takes seriously the material universe of His creation and especially that portion of it so essential to man—his body and his environmental world. God, who is aware, intelligent, and active, remembers man and makes provision for his future. And that's what heaven is all about.

The "end of the world" is not the end for the child of God, but the beginning. It is the beginning of an existence lived out in the confidence of health and fulfillment; health, because "health" and "whole" grow from a common root word, and fulfillment, because man's ultimate purpose—at-one-ment—is achieved. The universe and all the individuals in it are drawn back together again. In that beginning there is room and reason for unlimited aspiring, for the character of those who aspire is free of negation, contradiction, and destructive defiance—Godlike men, like God, ultimately become one.

The biblical heaven and earth made new are the fitting place for the final at-one-ment of man with himself, with his fellow man, and with God—time without end. At-one-ment also has its place.

In that fascinating description of the *place* of at-one-ment in the book Revelation John writes, "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with

men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3, 4).

So it will be, and thus it has always been. Having God with us makes everything new and different. It makes a difference to fear. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). (To be *for* us is to be *with* us, on our side.) It makes a difference to our understanding about truth and about God. Whenever God, not men's projected illusions, really appears among men He is perceived as friendly, compassionate, and gracious. When Moses asked God for a vision of Himself, "Shew me thy glory," God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (Exodus 33:18, 19). John said, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

It even makes a difference to the way a man sees himself. In the Old Testament story of Jacob and Esau, Jacob fled from his brother after defrauding him of the birthright blessing—and continued to flee for years and years with no one in pursuit. That's the way it is with sin. Finally, decades later, he quit running and returned to his homeland expecting only the worst. He approached the meeting with his brother with the kind of anxiety and terror that only the guilty experience, to discover that he had been fleeing all of those years from himself, from his own guilts and fears. His cry of wonder and surprise is the response of every redeemed soul who takes a close look at the face of God. "I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, *and thou wast pleased with me*" (Genesis 33:10).

One is reminded of the contrast of the cry of the unrepentant at the end for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them and hide them from God's face (see Revelation 6:15, 16), with that of those who have come to know God as He is, "This is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us . . . we will be

glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isaiah 25:9).

It was foretold of Jesus, “They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:23). All that anyone can truly say about God is summed up in that name. And that’s about all that really needs to be said—even if it takes a whole book to say it. *God is with us.*